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THE QUEEN OF
KARMANIA

MARIE VAN VORST

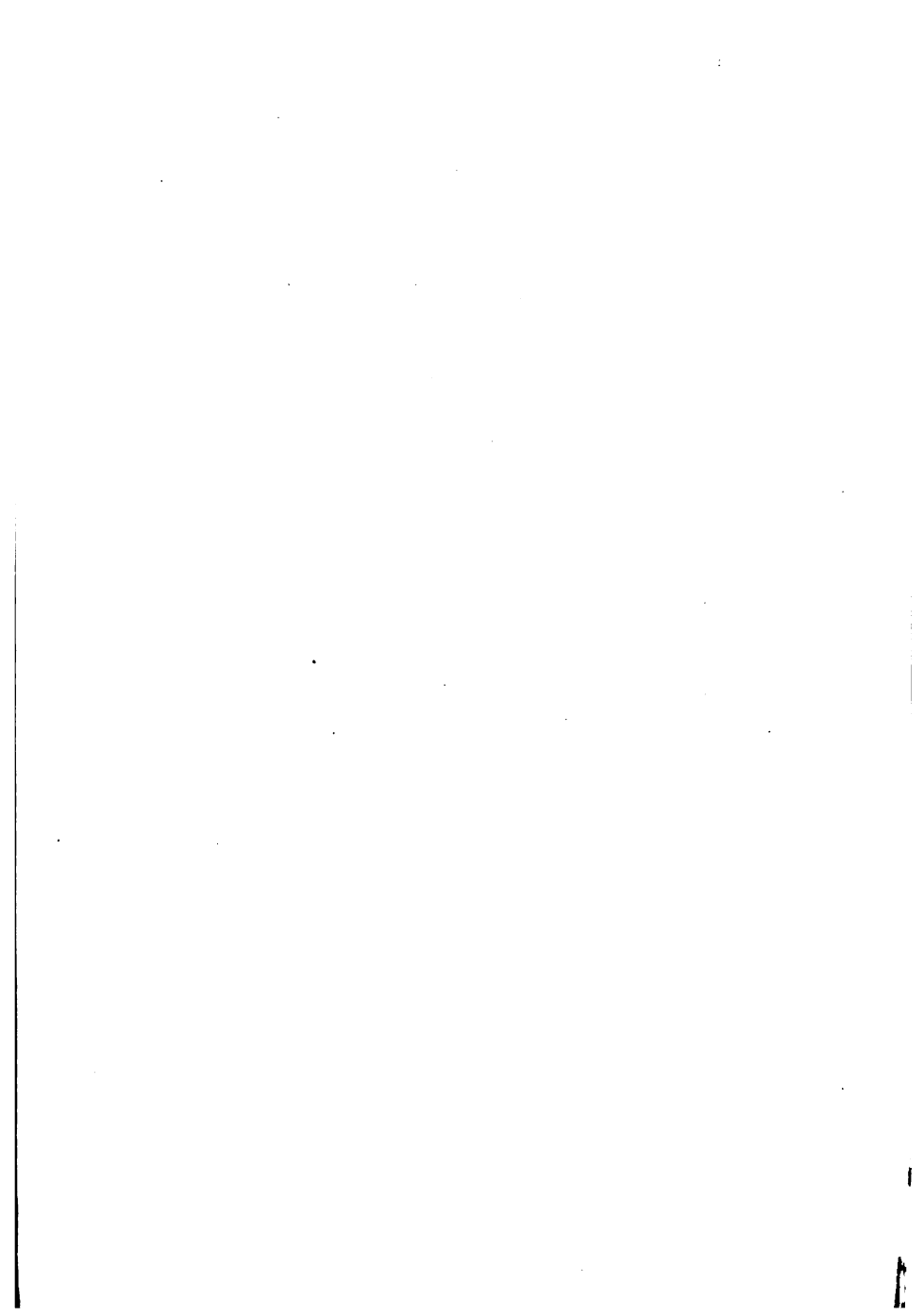


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THE QUEEN OF KARMANIA



THE QUEEN OF KARMANIA

BY

MARIE VAN VORST

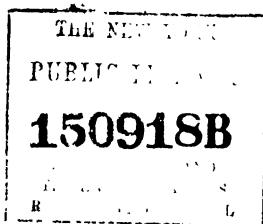
AUTHOR OF "FAIRFAX AND HIS PRIDE," "TRADITION,"
"BIG TREMAINE," ETC.



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CONTENTS

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
I. Stephen Crossdale Answers the Call of the Soil.....	1
II. Crossdale Hears the Hammers on the Dome.....	7
III. Prince John Orders Caviare and Crossdale Translates a Song.....	16
IV. Jeff Makes His Protest Against Autocracy.....	28
V. He Discovers How Dangerous It Is Sometimes to Make Too Good a First Impression.....	39
VI. Crossdale's Glass Is Small But It Is His Own and He Drinks from It.....	52
VII. To Always Keep in Mind the Reason for One's Journey and to be Able to Forget the Inn Beds Are Two of the Attributes of the Good Traveler....	65
VIII. He Learns That He Has Fallen in Love with a Mere Woman, with no History Worth Recalling.....	78
IX. If He Signs the Contract It Will Not Be for the Future of Karmania.....	88
X. Prince Sarvan Displays the Fervor of the Boys of '76.....	102
XI. He Answers the Call of the Wild.....	109
XII. He Comes Face to Face with the Intrigues of a Patriot.....	120
XIII. Crossdale Proves His Sporting Blood...	126
XIV. Crossdale Sees a Screen Picture.....	132

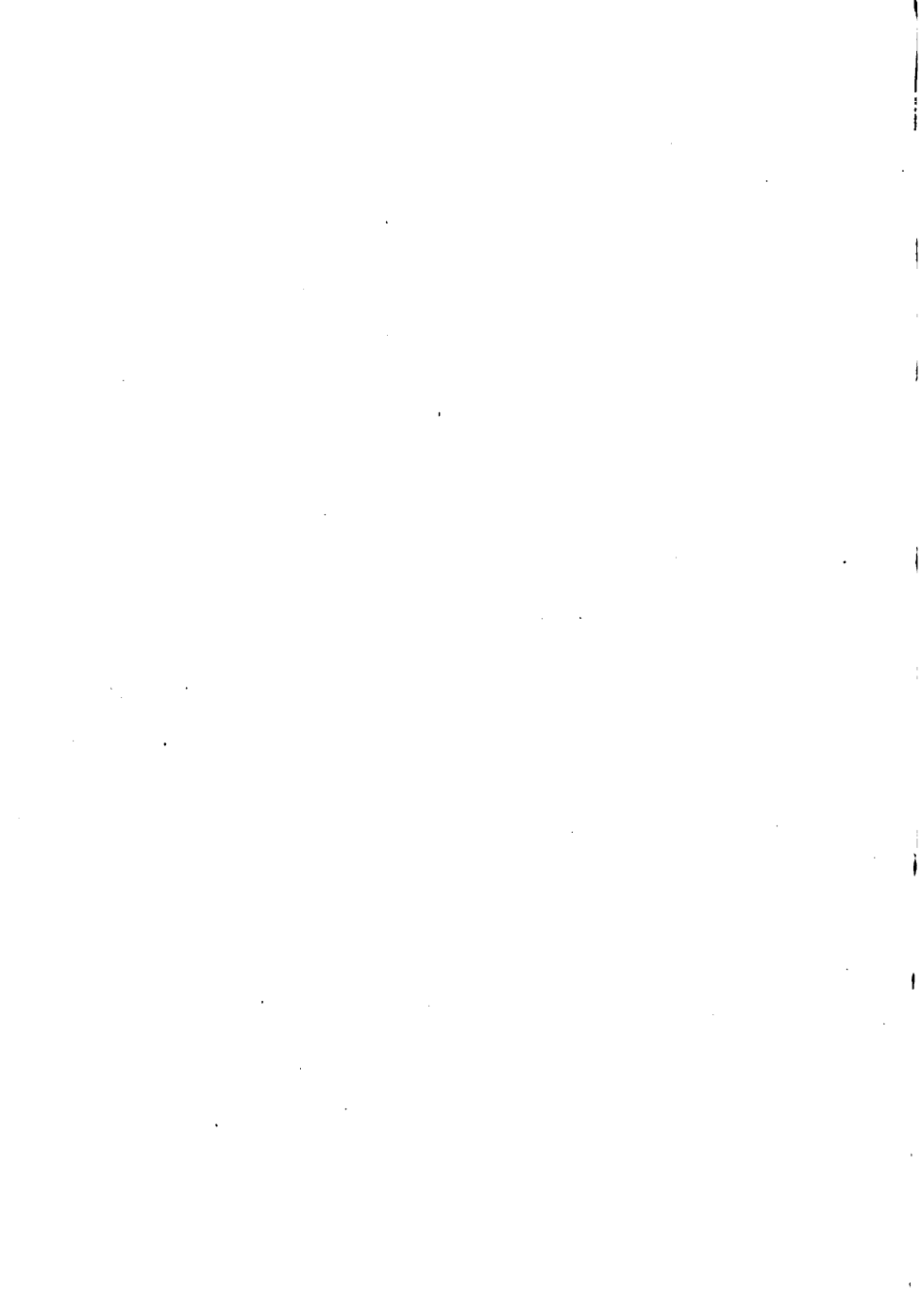
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<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
XV. — And Sees the Capital from the Heights.....	135
XVI. Crossdale Is in His Brown Tower.....	142
XVII. — And the Queen was in Her Parlor	148
XVIII. In a Strange Country a Roof-tree and a Loaf of Bread Are Not Sufficient. (Karmanian Proverb).....	159
XIX. The Morning Bird Asks a Question of the Day Which the Night Bird Answers.....	165
XX. When a Man Signs a Contract for the Sake of a Woman, He Imperils the Inheritance. (Karmanian Proverb)	172
XXI. He Finds An Empty Nest, but He Traps a Fox.....	184
XXII. The Queen Inverts the Proverb: "Love Me Love My Dog".....	193
XXIII. Crossdale Is Royally Commanded to Drink a Cup of Tea.....	202
XXIV. At the Queen's Lodge — "Sometime in November".....	211
XXV. A Woman in Love Fears Danger for Her Lover, Whereas His Greatest Danger Is Herself. (Karmanian Proverb.).....	219
XXVI. Korvan Receives a Sinister Invitation to Pass a Week-end with the Prime Minister.....	229
XXVII. Only the Confident and the Despairing Know How to Wait. (Karmanian Proverb.).....	239
XXVIII. When Your Neighbor's Wife Has Honey and Fire on Her Lips, a Wise Man Waits Till Her Husband Goes on a Journey. (Karmanian Proverb.)...	246

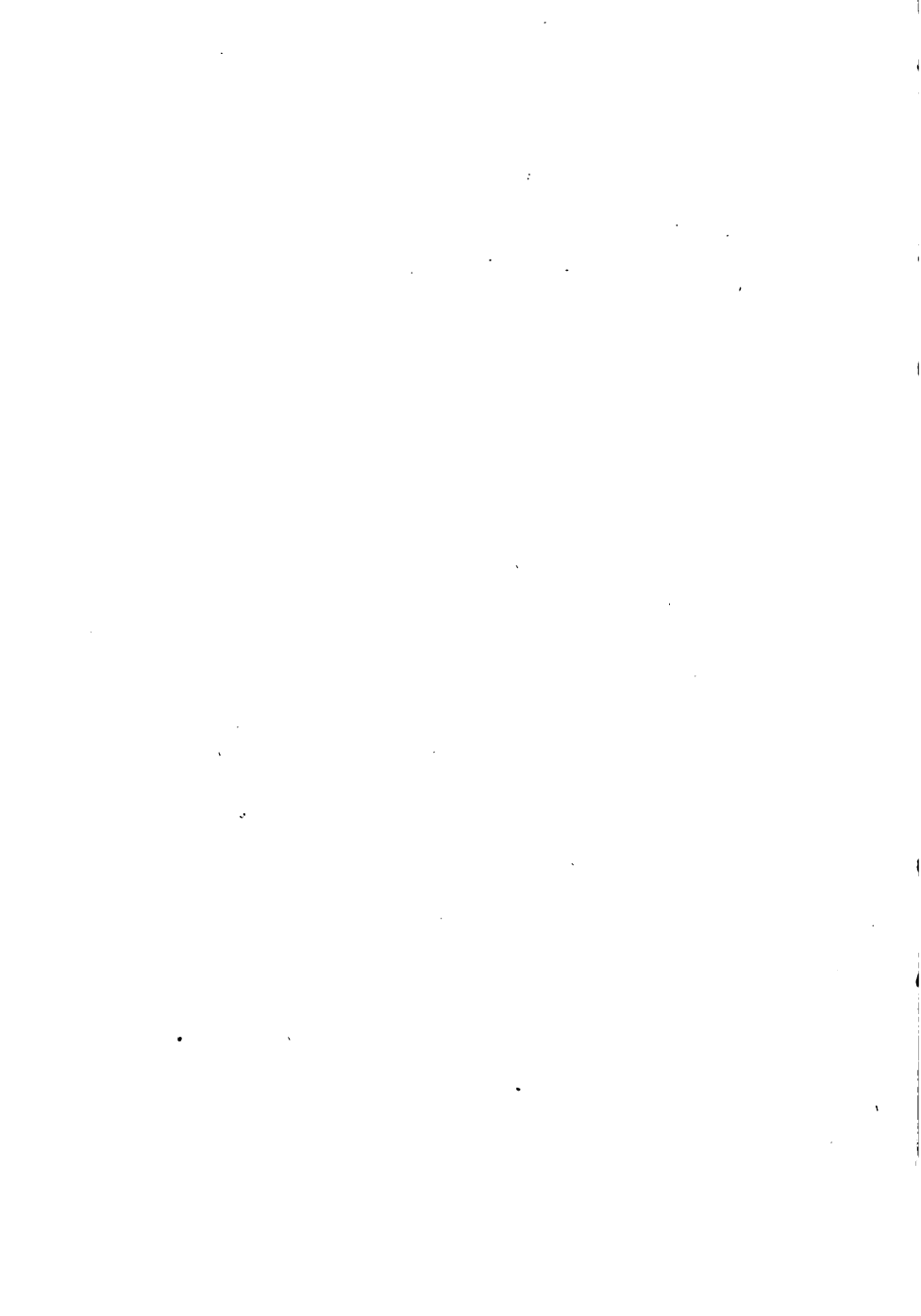
CONTENTS

vii

<i>Chapter</i>		<i>Page</i>
XXIX.	Any Woman May Become a Queen, but a Queen May Not Always Be a Woman. (Karmanian Proverb.)...	254
XXX.	A Peacock's Feather Brings Good Luck to a Sailor, Bad Luck to a Man Whose Wife Is Away from Home, and Sight to the Blind. (Karmanian Proverb.).....	264
XXXI.	The Earl of Moray Goes Staun'in' Through the Town.....	277
XXXII.	When the Boya-Duc Comes from the Far Country the Woman Will Dance with Him Though It Be over Her Husband's Grave. (Karmanian Proverb.).....	287
XXXIII.	Mr. Rat Comes to Town.....	296
XXXIV.	Karmania Has Her Waterways and Crossdale a Rendezvous.....	301
XXXV.	" Heljen: The Queen ".....	309
XXXVI.	The Cup at the Lips.....	317
XXXVII.	Zito's Blood Token.....	327
XXXVIII.	Ammetaro.....	335
XXXIX.	" I Will Give Him That Which I Have Kept for Him,".....	346



THE QUEEN OF KARMANIA



THE QUEEN OF KARMANIA

CHAPTER I

STEPHEN CROSSDALE ANSWERS THE CALL OF THE SOIL

He was riding slowly home; going back to a lonely house, to as much a home as a man can make without a woman. He could see the red roof of his own bungalow glowing out above the pepper trees, and below him as he rode the land was a riot of color, luxuriance and beauty. Bare-headed, his reins wound round his wrist, his hands in the pockets of his loose coat, he rode slowly, the light of the sunset glowing on his face and in his eyes. His mare, with head hung down, picked her way softly along the trail. Everything about the ranchman, from the light touch of his foot in the stirrup to the bare dark head and smiling mouth, his agreeable eyes and relaxed body, spoke contentment with life. He reflected the spirit and the joy of living. The foothills, purple, pink and blue, sweeping up to the heights, crimsoned and paled, and as he rode, Stephen Crossdale left behind him the fragrant forests of live oaks and the tall dark pines. The sage brush seemed painted by the brushes of the sunset and made a brilliant corridor for him to follow along the homeward trail.

There would be nothing novel to greet him down there in his red-roofed bungalow, with the bougainvillea vine staining its walls like blood. A supper set for him on the porch, a devoted negro-servant, who existed to make his

master's life smooth, every comfort throughout the long, low house that a bachelor had a right to expect—all this he knew he would find. But there was no one to share his bed and his board. His land was a paradise; he was alone in it; he was alone to know the thrilling delight in twilights and nights like this. Physically tired after a long day in the open, he was going back to solitude. How long would it be possible for him to ignore his need of The Woman?

That afternoon, when he had started home after his "round-up", he had looked in through the window of a derelict building on a deserted ranch. There was a country dance on, and the temptation to Crossdale to go in and share the fun had been too great to be resisted. Dancing was only one of the many forms of exercise he liked. To the music of a third-rate gramophone Stephen danced three times with a pretty little country girl, with big dark eyes and an appealing mouth. Then he had launched out and unhitched his mare from the post where he had tied her and started on his way. He softly whistled the dance-tune. His mare pricked up her ears and he gathered up his reins. Woman he had pretty well cut out of his life. He was fatuous enough to fancy one of these days it would be his good luck to find the perfect woman; he was waiting. A keen sportsman, successful in his profession, with plenty of money and tastes to gratify, he had until now passed his life agreeably and well. Several years before the war he had made his reputation in the engineering world, in laying out the Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico Railway. He tunnelled the Alleghanys. And when the American engineering force came back from France, Stephen Cross-

dale returned with it with a pair of lungs sufficiently affected by gas to require a renovation by oxygen. He had put a lot of money into cattle-raising in California and had never taken the time personally to work his ranch. Now, in these months of open-air life, and in the beauty and in the aloofness, he had fallen in love with California and with his new occupation.

There was no reason any longer why he should not go back to maps, charts, surveying, railroad contracts, hydraulics, dynamos and the rest of it, but he lingered. He could not make up his mind to break his dream. During his two years in California he had become widely known and much liked, and besides the interest in his life, cattle and horses, he had taken over contracts for the irrigation of the upper plains. There was a human element in the rough, wild country. He had been a leader all his life and he liked his kind.

Now a sound from behind made him turn abruptly, to face a Greaser, who had been following him stealthily. Crossdale like a flash covered him with his gun and both were on their feet facing each other the next moment. The fellow, head taller than the ranchman, one of those miserable crosses between Mexican and white, where the meaner qualities of both races seem to meet and breed dirt, was crazed with jealousy and drink.

"You cursed engineer! That little girl at Two Forks Ranch belongs to me! See? What you done to her? She won't have me!"

Before he had hardly finished, Crossdale, with one blow of his left arm and clenched fist, knocked the gun from the Greaser's hand; it fell, crashing; and with his right hand

he struck him full on the mouth. Then, before the Mexican could respond, Crossdale covered him with his gun. "Get on your horse in double quick time, and go back to your girl!"

The man was livid. Crossdale's blow had been efficient. The half-breed, cursing him and hating him with a real lover's hate, covered his mouth with his hand. Crossdale could hardly hear his invectives, rendered almost unintelligible by his swelling mouth; but he cursed Crossdale for a gentleman, a white-livered business man, mounted, and with his eyes on the live, nonchalant figure of the rancher, he retired, cursing, beaten.

When he was out of sight, Crossdale lowered his gun. He smiled. He envied this jealous lover, who had ridden hot on the trail because he had danced with a soft-eyed, pretty girl. He wanted to be a jealous, demanding lover, too, with the right to suffer and the right to enjoy.

He came along slowly toward the porch of his bungalow, and heard his negro manservant singing. Upstairs in his den were photographs of attractive women whose passing through his life at different times had been marked by more or less romance and disillusion. But on this night, when he had finished dressing, he went over to his desk and opened an old portfolio, full of scraps and bits of things, dating back to his college days. He went painstakingly through a lot of stuff until he came upon a foreign photograph, taken in a fashionable London studio in Dover Street, bearing the name of a court photographer. He had seen it in Boston among a collection of foreign beauties when he was in his freshman year at Yale. The grave, lovely face had charmed him, and after studying it from

the other side of the shop window finally he went in and bought the photo.

The young girl, not more than sixteen years of age, was Princess Something or other; Crossdale did not know which princess, or of what country, but he did not care. She was a mere child, her hair plaited down her back, a school girl in a simple frock, her lovely hands clasped meekly before her. The purity of the lines of the face, the candid, inquiring eyes, the grace—in short, her unlikeness to any woman or type of woman Crossdale had yet seen, fascinated the college man.

It has yet to be proved that one cannot fall in love with a picture, and this grave-eyed princess smiled at Crossdale from his chimney piece thereafter throughout his college course. She became a real person to him; he brought to her the stories of his perplexities and his youthful successes; whatever problems he had to face, he faced them under her eyes, smoking his pipe with his arm upon the chimney shelf. She could never mean anything to him; he would never know who she was, in all probability. Foreign royalties play small part in the life of American youth. But she had her day and her power; she made him dream—all any woman should hope to do who is unknown and unnamed. Then Crossdale went into real life and real things; there were other photographs and pictures, with flesh and blood realities back of them, and this photograph was forgotten in an old portfolio, with other scraps and mementoes.

Tonight he wanted to find her again. The little girl at the dance had made him think of the unknown princess. He turned the picture over. There was not even a pencilled

name on the back to reveal her identity. She would be a woman now, a stunning woman! He stood the picture up on his dressing-table and went downstairs, whistling the tune of the fox-trot to which he had danced over at the ranch with the Greaser's sweetheart.

On the porch, waiting for him, he found his negro servant, a pail of cracked ice in one hand and a napkin thrown over his arm. Several years before Crossdale had beguiled this snowy-toothed African to throw up his job on a Pullman car on the Pennsylvania Limited and to come to him as useful man; but Jeff Robinson never lost the stamp and unmistakable atmosphere of the train-service man. Crossdale had a feeling sometimes that he would fetch a whisk broom out of his pocket and brush him off.

"Mister Crossdale, suh, de supper am ready." And Jeff never announced "De supper am ready," or "Dinner am served" without his master mentally adding "In the dining car!"

CHAPTER II

CROSSDALE HEARS THE HAMMERS ON THE DOME

His ranch had never seemed so intolerably lonely to him before tonight. He had been a fool to dance with that little soft-eyed girl. As he passed through his living-room he almost fancied that she ran before him, disappearing tantalizingly up the stairs.

When he came out on to the porch an hour later, over plains and foothills and rose-gardens, over bay trees, Italian cypresses and geranium hedges, the moonlight spilled its honey-like gold. He expected no delightful surprise to greet him on his return home; only his solitary supper spread on a small table in the open waited for him.

The negro, Jeff Robinson, was the king-pin of the ranch and lorded it over the Mexican servants by virtue of physical force. When one of the Greasers got on his susceptible nerves Jeff beat him up and threw him out. Now the negro, from behind his master's chair, watched him eat with benevolent delight.

"'Frisco's bin tryin' to get yo' on de 'phone all day, Mister Crossdale."

"Mighty glad they didn't."

Jefferson Robinson's chuckle was discreetly covered. He had but one desire in life—to get back to the town; but did not dare broach the subject to Crossdale, who was developing an inordinate adoration for the open.

"Goin' out to toss yo' up a few banana fritters, suh," and the African slipped away on his flat, willing feet.

Left alone, Crossdale stretched himself, fingered his glass of whiskey and water, and looked into the flooding serenity of the peerless night. He was fated tonight to be pursued by a haunting picture of an ideal companion. He smoked, musing of women he had known, unable to imagine one of them queen of this realm. The only way to reach his bungalow was by the trail from the foothills; to get back to civilization meant a two days' ride and one night's sleep at Monterey.

His former associate, Caleb Storm, President of the Western Transportation Company, had not yet been out to the ranch, and Crossdale had resisted elastically, obstinately, every inducement until now to return to business.

The entrance to the bungalow was screened off by a geranium hedge and a grove of orange trees, and as he mused he heard voices and the peculiar call of the Mexican cowboy. Visitors were rare, but they came now and then. He was growing unsociable, hermit-like.

Two Mexican guides and a big man on a tired, gray horse appeared around the turn. Crossdale sprang forward, crying eagerly: "K! By Jove!" The natives slipped like grease from their mounts and came to the head of Caleb Storm's pony.

"Hallo, Cincinnatus!" Storm climbed stiffly down from his horse. "Steve, send these fellers round to your stables or your garage or whatever you've got. Gad, why don't you go out into the country while you're about it? Think of living three days' ride from any place God made!"

"K, this is the best ever!"

It took a second or two for the president of the Western Transportation Company to uncurl. He clapped one hand on his shoulder and then on his leg. "Stiff?" he grimaced. "Oh, no!" He motioned to Jeff. "No food for me, Jeff, until I have limbered up. Give me a hot bath, with plenty of ammonia in it."

The two friends walked together to the living room. "I feel as though I had been married to a saddle." Storm in passing through, glanced at the big living room. "Bang up, Steve—absolutely bully! Haven't hurt yourself denying yourself anything, boy!"

The rugs of fur, the big, roomy chairs, the broad, low proportions of the big bungalow, now full of twilight shadow and moonlight; the wide fireplace, with the logs laid against a sudden freshness; the luxurious and inviting hospitality of the place, appealed to Storm. He took it all in with his quick, gray eyes, behind his highly polished glasses. "It's all right," he said, still looking about him. "I'll enjoy one of those soft chairs when I come down stairs."

When he had finished a perfect dinner which Jeff had installed for him on a small table in front of a big, roomy lounge, Crossdale said to him: "Gad, but I am glad to see you, K! I didn't know I could be so glad. Now you have loosened up a bit you will have to tell me what has brought you out here. I see it isn't trouble. You look too peaceful!"

Storm waved his plump hand toward the big center table. "Clean it off," he said authoritatively. "I have a lot of stuff to lay out there." He got up from the sofa gingerly, and before Crossdale knew it, books and gramophone discs were on the chairs and floor. Under the big lamp, Storm

was spreading out from a huge portfolio, of a kind and character familiar to Crossdale, maps, contracts, railroad and engineering plans.

"What the devil, K—?"

The president of the W. T. C. looked at him almost appealingly. "Let me do it my way, old man. Sit over there where I can see you."

As Stephen Crossdale took his place opposite, half defiantly, he looked as if he were afraid of some proposition which he was sure Storm was going to make. Storm bent his head and face over the maps with the foreign lettering all through—strange, hieroglyphic-like characters—maps of mountains, rivers, wastes.

"Ever hear of a little old stream called the Danube, Crossdale?"

"But I never saw it spelled in hieroglyphics, K."

"Look at her, old boy—there she flows down to the Black Sea." Storm's finger stopped. "Now see this red flag?"

Under the native characters was written in English and Stephen Crossdale read: "Tamaresk."

Storm crowed. "Sounds fine. Great to hear you say it out loud!"

Crossdale laughed. "It sounds to me like a queer fruit," he said, "the kind you see in the windows, buy from curiosity; when you get your teeth in it—gad! you heave it away. Now, K, what is the dope with all this stuff here?"

His partner ignored him, bending over the papers. "Now you get off with me at Tamaresk, see? And hike over these hills inland a couple of days' travel. What's written under that heathen Chinese writing—in English—read it out, Steve."

"Karmanian Hills."

"Some hills, aren't they, boy?"

"Carpathians?"

"Not on your life—*Karmanians*, running through the kingdom of Karmania, highest peak eight thousand feet." Storm laughed out loud.

But Stephen Crossdale was not coming across at all. "What are you doing with the Karmanian mountains?" he said grudgingly. "Going to climb them next summer, old man?" looking at his friend's avoirdupois.

But the president of the W. T. C. shook his head. "It is a pretty solid wall, boy, to stand between an ambitious people and a seaport, between commerce and wealth and waterways. Come along—let's go over the Karmanians together."

"What for?"

"Because there's no other way yet, Stephen. You will remember that the W. T. C. shipped to Karmania a big consignment of railroad building equipment before the war?"

"Yes, I remember that."

"That lay-out was for the kingdom of Karmania. The Karmanians are going to cut through to the Danube River; their tunnel is already half-way through the Karmanians on both sides. The port will be Tamaresk."

Caleb Storm looked frankly at his partner and watched Crossdale's fingers as they began, with a certain eagerness, to touch the documents on the table, and his clever, intelligent face began to alter from its quiet content, to waken and animate.

"Good Heavens, Crossdale, but it is good to see you touch

something that looks like work again!" Stephen Crossdale dropped the papers.

"Get some other fellow for your job, K. I am a cowboy."

"Nonsense!" said the other man quickly. "You won't go back on the W. T. C. Come across, Stephen, come across!"

"How the deuce did you ever hear of all this, K?"

"Representative over here," said the other man. "They handed us out a first-rate proposition. They want the W. T. C. to run their railroad, complete their tunnel. It's an easy little job for a man like you, Steve—a pot of money—you use native labor."

"Stop!" said Stephen Crossdale, lifting up his hand. "Don't go on. I wouldn't touch it for a fortune. I have got my job right here," he glanced around his sympathetic room, "right here."

Now at this point Caleb Storm displayed genius. He rose and, taking another chair over by the big, broad window, with its outlook on the brilliant western night, flooded with moonlight, full of dazzling radiance, transforming blossoms, trees and every growing thing, turned his back on his friend. Stephen Crossdale began to handle the documents on the center table. There was a magic in them which he had forgotten. The attraction and fascination of his old work came to him all the more strongly because he had forgotten it so long. After a few moments he went over to Caleb Storm in the big chair. The president of the Western Transportation Company was dosing; he opened his eyes with a start.

"I have glanced the stuff over; seems all right."

"Good enough, Steve."

Crossdale asked: "What is their language?"

"Well," said Caleb Storm, "what do you think I am? Professor of Sanskrit? I dare say it is the language of their country." He grinned. "Don't happen to speak it, do you, Steve?"

But Crossdale did not answer in the same vein. He returned slowly: "U—m—I don't know. I speak something or other—one of the Balkan dialects. We none of us ever knew what it was. My father was consul for ten years in Roumania. Curious, isn't it?" he said smiling. "I was born in Bukarest, and we brought away with us my old native nurse, and I always talked her language. She only died a few years ago. We adored her. She was a beautiful old woman, and I spoke with her in her own tongue, all my life."

Caleb Storm was very slightly impressed. Dialects and languages meant absolutely nothing to him, and no subject in the world ever led him away from his own point until it was gained. He was looking eagerly, affectionately, at Crossdale. The young fellow was, in Cabel Storm's estimation, the finest type of man. Crossdale's humor and human kindness, his understanding of life, his handling of men and difficult propositions, had made him extremely valuable and sympathetic to Caleb Storm. He knew that Crossdale could be counted upon to the limit. He was obliged to confess to himself—and he did so grudgingly: "This life out here suits Steve down to the ground! He is as brown as a sunset peach and as fit as a fiddle."

Stephen was saying: "So you want me to go over to Karmania and tunnel the Karmanians? You want me to complete that darned old road, do you?"

"I didn't say so, Stephen."

"Oh, you've said nothing else, K. Your 'Hallo, Cincinnati!' gave you away. What is the population?"

"About five hundred thousand."

"What's the government?"

"Monarchy. King and Queen."

"Sounds like a pack of cards, K. You rich men cannot rest; you can't let anybody else rest! Can't let us have a leisure class in the United States."

Storm laughed. "You call ranching leisure?"

Crossdale turned his eyes slowly out to the moonlight and the land. Then Storm altered, became magnetic. He always scored his points. He sprang up from his chair and forgot that he was stiff and heavy. He caught Crossdale by the arm and his eyes flashed. "You are too young to return to the soil. You are a man of action, a man of cities, a man of creative mechanical genius!" He lifted up his hand. "Listen!"

But Crossdale was facing the window. He did not look at his friend.

"Listen! Hark—what do you hear?" Crossdale stood motionless.

"Don't you hear the toot-toot of the engines and the sharp bright click of the drill? Don't you hear the drill, drill of the steel needles piercing down? Don't you hear the voices and the calls?" Storm leaned forward tensely and gesticulated towards the fields. "See how dark it is."

"A cloud across the moon, Caleb," murmured Crossdale.

"It's smoke blowing out to us from the tunnel's mouth."

Crossdale slowly turned. "Oh, come on up to bed, K. You've spoiled a dream for me."

The other man linked his arm through Stephen Crossdale's and they walked slowly along together toward the stairway. "Nonsense! Ranching will keep."

As they went along across the room toward the door and the stairway, Storm said: "The W. T. C. are prepared to make you the following proposition—"

Crossdale shook his head impatiently. "We'll talk business tomorrow. I'm not doing it for money—I'm doing it for the sporting proposition—for the adventure."

CHAPTER III

PRINCE JOHN ORDERS CAVIARE AND CROSSDALE TRANSLATES A SONG

Lazily enjoying the fairyland of willow growth stretching for hundreds of miles along the shores of the Danube, from Lintz to the Iron Gates, Crossdale travelled towards the Black Sea, under the spell adventure casts. The heat was intense, and comfortably settled on one of the wooden seats close to the boat rail, he smoked countless cigarettes and watched the changing shores. The stops the little steamer made at the river towns gave him a chance to study the curious type of peasants, as the crowds of soldiers, market people, Hungarians, Roumanians, Austrians and Germans thronged the quays, waiting for the daily arrival of the Lintz mail.

The Danube, pale, unearthly, cobweb-gray or delicate yellow, was full of personality, as it widened, deepened, on its mighty course from the Black Forest to the sea; and on either side the willow world offered at one moment silver leaves to the wind-swept forests, then seemed to hang a veil of green across the shores. After a little, Crossdale saw the foothills of the Karmanians, creeping up into heights, their brown tips peaked by brown castles, and their ancient charm made him for a moment forget what a rabid democrat he was. He thought he would like to be ruler in one of these strongholds, lord of river and forest, with the jolly

days of autocracy back again. Downstairs in his cabin, his credentials to the Karmanian Government were securely stowed away. These he was to present to the envoys of the Karmanian court at the little town of Tamaresk.

He had singled out one distinguished looking passenger as being a man of mark. This gentleman had sat at the head of the table in the deck dining room, as Crossdale sampled a royal goulash—a mysterious pastry—whilst deceiving himself into thinking that the native wine, clear as amber, could be drunk without stint. The gentleman at the head of the table might have been a king, if looks go for anything. Crossdale had found the caviare, the pure article, fresh from the Danube sturgeon, the best he had ever tasted, but it had not been good enough for the kingly traveller, who had nearly flung it at the head of the waiter, and procured for the whole table an even more delicious supply. Now the foreigner, in a shaded part of the boat, with his monocle adjusted, was reading a novel and listening to a native orchestra installed in the stern, with their national instruments. One man in embroidered coat and voluminous white trousers stood in the center of the circle with his mellow, human-voiced violin. The weird, plaintive melody filled the evening silence, falling over the yellow river and the rugged shores.

Crossdale's traveller shut his book, dropped it into the pocket of his loose tweed coat. His clothes were unmistakably British, and worn with a knowing disregard of convention. He was doubtless, the American was sure, a howling swell. Crossdale thought him about forty and liked his looks. In the slender face there was a fine distinction, the mouth well formed and cold under a closely

trimmed moustache. He was angular, loosely made, with a vigorous body, and a skin darker than European coloring. His eyes were blue and his hair abundant, slightly touched with gray, as though a powder-puff had brushed it, and would unmistakably have curled had it not been cut so closely to his fine head.

The stranger left his seat and came slowly over toward Crossdale, half smiling, and handed him an open cigarette case. "Have one of these?"

"Thanks. I was just going down to my cabin to fill up my own case. I am smoked out."

He sat down beside Crossdale on the narrow seat, whilst the musicians, violently applauded by the picturesque passengers, repeated one of their folk songs.

"Fairly good for gypsy music, what?"

"Perfectly fine!" exclaimed Crossdale warmly. "Of course we get all that type of thing in the United States, but this is the pure article, hot from the griddle!" The other threw back his head and laughed frankly.

"Immense!" he exclaimed. "I have not heard real American for a long time."

"That's what I talk," said Crossdale coolly, "real American, as the hundred million speak it, more or less."

The man sat down contentedly fixing his vis-a-vis with his keen eyes. Crossdale had never been looked over and out, into and through, so thoroughly. If a man had looked at him like that in the West, he would probably have punched him. He did not mind.

"I am a great lover of the United States," said the distinguished gentleman.

"Good enough." The American nodded. Crossdale was

used to receiving impressions from people quickly. He was used to different types of men. He liked this one. "I am glad you don't hate us," Crossdale said. "Been in the West?"

"Only in the West, as a matter of fact. I was called back suddenly to the Balkans before I could see all I wanted of the Atlantic coast. If I had not been born what I am (what the deuce was he born, Crossdale wondered?) I would rather be born an American."

"Westerner?"

"California ranchman. I came back from the United States drunk with a dream of democracy."

Crossdale smiled. "Fine!" he said, in his agreeable voice, with its slight drawl. "Democracy's the greatest thing in the world. The United States has had the big advantage of starting right, unhampered from the beginning by rotten governments. We have got a straight ideal, and up hill and down hill I guess we'll pull it off all right in the end."

For a second the other removed his eyes from Crossdale's attractive eager face. They smoked in silence, then Crossdale accepted a second cigarette. It was fatter, longer than the usual type; with a crest on it and a name in gold letters.

In the pause, which extended itself for a few minutes, Crossdale listened to the gypsy orchestra. The violinist seemed to tear from the wood in his hand a rhapsody of melody. Suddenly the stranger animated. He started. With one slender brown hand he pointed to the sunset reddening the hills. "Do you know anything about this country?"

"Only," said Crossdale, "that it is full of charm."

"The Arians, Slavs, Turks, Magyars—all have passed over

it. Franks and Vandals scoured it." He leaned over and put his hand on Crossdale, pointing with the other. "Back of those hills is the most beautiful little kingdom on the earth," he looked at Crossdale, "Karmania."

Crossdale waited. He was not going to tell this man that he was bound for this attractive little joint. "I will bet a dollar bill," he thought to himself, "that he expects me to present my credentials."

"It was civilized before you wild democrats existed. You don't know anything about Karmania?"

"No, not a darned thing."

"When Caesar passed through, one of his generals had a passionate dream of power; one of those intoxicating dreams that come to strong, ardent men, even sometimes to women." Crossdale listened, charmed by the man's voice and by his personality. "This Caesarian captain of legions stormed a certain hill and forced himself through, founded the Republic of Karmania," the man continued. "It was born a republic, remained a republic, until two hundred years ago."

"Well," said Crossdale appreciatively, "it has got a great little history, hasn't it?"

"A brilliant one. For centuries its morale was so high, it never fell into the hands of tyrants; it kept its integrity, democratic, idealistic, pure."

"How big is it?" asked the practical American.

"Two hundred thousand inhabitants."

"What is its future?" asked the citizen of a progressive country.

The two men sitting on the little bench together in the sunset were entirely apart from the rest of the passengers, apparently unobserved by any save the musicians. The

man with the human-voiced violin played to them ravishingly, but they did not seem to hear the wizard-like music.

The stranger dropped his voice. "You are a magician, and charming me into speaking of a land I love."

"Go on," said Crossdale. "I've heard about the little place. I'd like to see it."

"Before the war," the stranger smoked, musing as he spoke, "there was a revolution in the country of Karmania, and the Prime Minister then in power was exiled." Crossdale thrust his hands in his pockets, listened like a boy at class. "Karmania is a back number in customs and progress," said the stranger, "but at last it stretches out its arms to the waterways. We must have an outlet to the Danube and the sea. Our original company was formed to run the railroad from the capital to Tamaresk, but the engineer who was tunnelling the Karmanians when the war broke out was foully murdered because he was believed to be in collusion with the revolutionists." At this cheerful announcement of his predecessor's sudden death, Crossdale's eyelids did not flicker. He listened intently.

"I do not know for what reason you have come to this part of the world, but I trust my intuitions." His inference was unmistakable. He smiled charmingly, took his card-case from his pocket and handed his card to Crossdale:

Prince John Sarvanarof
Jockey Club, Paris

"Not a king," Crossdale mused, "just under it. That is the chap—Sarvanarof—he's my man." He looked up frankly. "Didn't you expect to meet me on this boat?"

Prince John studied Crossdale's card, but did not appear to know the name. "I had no idea such good luck was in store for me."

Crossdale asked: "Is Sarvanarof a Karmanian name?"

"One of the most common names of the country."

"You speak bitterly about the state of affairs in Karmania." Crossdale pursued. "What is the matter with it? What is wrong?"

The other turned his eyes away. Their look flitted over the musicians. He smiled inscrutably, as though something amused him which he did not share with Crossdale. "Karmania is under a damnable spell just now." Crossdale waited. "The people are hypnotized by the Queen, and the monarchical idea."

"It is a monarchy, isn't it?" said Crossdale. "There's a king and a queen?"

"There is very much of a queen, indeed!" exclaimed the Prince. "She is so autocratic and so profoundly embedded in the hearts of her subjects that for the present, Karmania is lost. It is swamped in autocracy."

Crossdale did not say: "What the deuce does it matter, any way, what happens to a little bunch of barbarians over on the other side of those great powerful mountains?"

"I suppose," he said keenly, "the Queen is one of the ardent persons you were speaking of, a woman in love with power?"

Sarvanarof bowed his head. "You cannot blame Karmen Mara. She is young, she is adored. The Queen is a despot. She comes from the people—what you might call a 'come-back.'" He laughed. "I learned that expression in the American West. Twelve years ago the King fell in love

with her, when she was merely a child, and sent her with her sister to England, to be educated; and when she came back he forced her to marry him at sixteen out of hand."

"Rotten!" Crossdale exclaimed hotly. "Kidnapping! I don't wonder she tries to hypnotize the people! I hope she gets something out of her job."

"She was," said his companion, "not exactly what you would call a commoner, for all that. Mariska and Karmen Mara were the daughters of one of the old brigand chiefs. They really form a sort of aristocracy. And she inherits from his ancestors a fine lot of courage and spirit and an inordinate arrogance for a woman." He was looking at Crossdale, but he was apparently far away. He was absorbed in the picture he was drawing of the Queen of Karmania.

As the darkness fell the young man became less distinct, but Prince John already had a mental photograph of the lines of the American's lean, well made figure and his frank, attractive face. Little did Crossdale imagine the unusual impression he had made upon this strange man. The uncompromising patriot determined to attach the American to his party if possible, and to use him in any way he could for the cause of liberty.

Now the violinist, tearing away harder than ever into the heart and soul of his instrument, came close and sang to them alone four verses of a native folk song. Stephen Crossdale listened tensely, leaning forward, with parted lips. Every now and then he exclaimed, with something of a little laugh: "The deuce!" "By Jove!" When the musician had finished he sprang up, and standing before the Prince said rapidly, in a low tone:

"I *say*—listen, will you? Look here— isn't *this* something like what he's singing?—

" 'What shall be given
To him who comes riding
Over the mountains and through the forests
To our hill city?
Much gold and glory?

" 'He comes for neither.
So the rider, the stranger,
Goes back unsatisfied!

" 'What shall I give him
Who comes so far and so gladly?
A gift for a stranger—
A gift for a rider—
I will give him that which I have kept for him—
that which my mother gave me.
What is this gift? The heart in my breast.
When he feels it he will count its beating.'

"Isn't that what it means, more or less? You know."

The face of Prince John was no less keen in its excitement than Crossdale's.

"Good God!" he said, catching hold of Crossdale's arm.
"Why that song was Karmanian, and in dialect! You speak Karmanian, you speak the dialect?"

Stephen Crossdale threw himself down again on the bench and burst out laughing. "Gosh!" he exclaimed. "I didn't know it, but I do. Karmanian! If that isn't the limit! When I was a kid my father was consul at Bukarest, and I had an old nurse come from God knows where, and she

taught me the dialect of her people. We took her over to the States. She lived with us twenty years. We never knew what her speech was; she did not know herself, but I have always known it. By George!" he exclaimed. "Honestly, is it Karmanian?"

He repeated, not unmusically, a verse of the song, his fine eyes fixed on the Prince.

"Excellent!" exclaimed Sarvanarof. "The Queen of Karmania ought to hear you—it is one of her songs. You will hear it everywhere you go."

Crossdale was so absorbed in the fact of his discovery, the fact that he could speak and understand the language of the country into which he was going, that he almost forgot his companion. Little Karmania! He had heard a lot about it in the last half hour—and he could speak its language!

Prince John arose. "I'm going downstairs to interview the cook, and order a special little supper for you and me. Let the rabble go in and feed. You and I will *eat* later on deck."

He did not go down to see the cook at once, but to his cabin, and one of the musicians slipped out from the group of players and followed the Prince. On the staircase Sarvanarof murmured, without turning his head:

"*Skarervaro batucho*. I want a few words with you in my room." Once within the cabin, the Prince shut the door and locked it, and looking sternly at the musician said: "I knew you at once, Refan Ugo. Your disguise is wretched. If you are on board to spy upon me you should have concealed yourself more successfully."

"It is impossible to keep anything from your Excellency!"

Prince John looked the man up and down, as though he hated every inch of him. "You miserable half-breed!" he said. "Our day of reckoning will come. Now I want you to answer me three questions. Who is this American?"

The man answered glibly: "Mr. Stephen Crossdale of California. He has come to Karmania to finish the tunnel, to run the railroad through to the Danube."

Prince John's face illumined. "Oh, my God! *This* is too good to be true! What, in spite of the Prime Minister, in spite of the opposition, in spite of the Queen herself?"

"I swear," said Refan Ugo, lifting his hand to make his words more impressive, "it is God's truth."

But Sarvanarof caught the man by the shoulder, and shook him like a rat. "Liar! Miserable liar!" Then he dropped the spy as though he had been a puppy and murmured to himself: "This means progress, life, Karmania's future—and other things—the railroad, commerce, industry!"

The spy, watching him, could not help but be impressed by the Prince's fire. "Your excellency, it is the work of the Queen herself."

Sarvanarof smiled skeptically. "I don't believe it. She is too much under the power of that dandy, her present Prime Minister."

"She is becoming modern. She is very much beloved and more and more powerful. She desires progress for the country. It is because of the Queen's insistence that this American engineer has been brought from the United States." Ugo touched his forehead in the Karmanian manner of salutation. "*Heljen*," he murmured, finishing in a reverential tone, "the Queen."

But Prince John simply inclined his head shortly. "You have told me great news. I could almost forgive your treachery to me for this." He nodded upward toward the deck. "So that's your engineer, is it? Well, he's an improvement on poor Baumgarten, I must say!" He threw back his head and laughed, and narrowing his eyes said in a tone full of menace: "I warn you that if anything happens to Mr. Crossdale—if he disappears—you will have to answer to—" and he hesitated, "the United States."

The Prince started, half lifted his hand as though to strike the man, but contained himself. He unlocked the door and opened it. "Now," he said, "get out whilst I am willing that you should go without harm. Our day of reckoning will come. I do not know what force you have on board with you, but if you take any step to menace my safe-conduct, the boat on which we are travelling will be blown to atoms. You have your secret service men; I have mine." The spy slipped out.

"Good night," said the Prince shortly. "When you see Her Majesty, as you probably will, and when you report to her our delightful interview, tell her from me that in the name of the new Republic I thank her for building the Royal State Railroad."

CHAPTER IV

JEFF MAKES HIS PROTEST AGAINST AUTOCRACY

Before they parted Prince John informed Crossdale that "The Yellow Moon" was the one decent restaurant in Tamaresk. His adieux to the Prince had been short and summary. He was leaning on the rail of the steamer in the moonlight, when Sarvanarof touched him on the shoulder.

"Good night, Mr. Crossdale—not good-bye. I shall see you soon. Don't taint your pure democracy in Karmania, not even for the favors of the Queen."

Sarvanarof had slipped from the boat at Gieurgevo, and Stephen watched his distinguished figure, in its long military overcoat, disappear in the crowd of motleys.

Crossdale discovered "The Yellow Moon" easily. It seemed as though everybody else in the world was discovering it with him. The stodgy, stucco cafe, with a Chinese-looking sign swinging out, a cluster of little green lights above it like a bunch of grapes, was the one likely-looking building in Tamaresk. Tonight was evidently the night for the tow. Boat crowds and citizens pressed into the eating house as though to a prize-fight, and Crossdale followed them. Peasants in native dress, stiff white starched skirts, barelegged, with yellow and red shoes, gaily-embroidered jackets, soldiers, Turks, Jews—and every man-jack of them wearing the inevitable tarbush.

Crossdale hated to go in out of the warm yellow moon-

light, flooding river and shores, but he was hungry and, moreover, he had a rendezvous in Tamaresk with the representatives of the Karmanian Government. No one had met him at the boat landing and he had an idea that something would turn up for him here. The room into which he was swept by the crowd was heavy with the odors of oriental food. Wide to the blue eastern night, the small windows, with their leaded casings, were thrown open. Every table was full.

The American looked around helplessly. The serving men, more like ballet dancers than waiters, forced their way through the medley of people, in white outstanding skirts, tarbushes and brilliant jackets of silver and velvet. Over the throaty jargon of the unnecessarily excited crowd, Crossdale heard the native music crying out from a corner, where another group of musicians were at it in great form.

His man Jeff had gone on to the Grand Hotel, further on up in the town, to take quarters for his master for the night, and to ask for letters.

The American saw a man break loose from a little group in the corner and come over toward him, catching one of the ballet-dancer waiters by the arm as he came—a tall, dark-skinned Oriental, rather soldierly in his bearing, very smart in gray linen clothes, soft gray hat, and pleated shirt with wide, low collar. He half threw the miserable waiter against a table, which the native cleared like magic, driving away the former occupants as though they were hungry dogs.

The man in gray linen clothes came over to Crossdale. He made a military salute and said respectfully: "Welcome

to Karmania, Mr. Crossdale. I have told these fellows to clear you a table."

Crossdale had no intention in the world of handing out his credentials to the first man who greeted him by name. "Sorry," he said, "you have made a mistake." The other man was not in the least disconcerted. He smiled with unmistakable intelligence, and the American understood in a flash that he really knew him to be Stephen Crossdale.

He found himself before a little table, at the other end of which the man in gray linen seated himself, rubbing together with satisfaction his flexible hands. A heavy chain bracelet dangled from below his cuff, and he wore on the little finger of his right hand a huge emerald, set in the rough.

"He is a picture card, all right!" Crossdale thought. "If that is the type of man around here—!"

On the menu were no doubt a lot of good things, but they were described in hieroglyphics. The native took the bill-of-fare. "Do let me order you something to eat—planked steak, onions a la Tamaresk, new peas, Russian salad, white wine and seltzer."

Before the other could speak, in a torrent of Karmanian, the man in gray linen ordered supper, with coffee, native cigars and a glass of *reka* to follow. Now the room, at first packed with people, began to clear. Where had they vanished?

"They drift in and out like that. They have gone to dance in the rooms back. There are more than usual to-night. Your boat was crowded, and then every one's hanging around to catch a glimpse of a famous personage who is passing through. We rather fear a demonstration in favor

of a great republican leader, but we are prepared. You noticed the crowd?"

The waiter put down before Crossdale a tureen of earthenware, and when he lifted the cover, emancipated a fragrant odor of herbs and vegetables, tempting, tantalizing, and before Crossdale could serve himself, the dark, deft hands had poured the contents of the tureen into his soup plate.

"That," said the man in gray, "is Karmanian goulash. The best in the world."

The waiter who served him had great gold ear-rings in his ears and a turquoise ring on his hand. "There seems to have been a cheap ring sale here," Crossdale thought. "It's the fashion!" "Yes," he said. "I noticed a crowd. It looked to me like a traveling circus going home."

"The usual country crowd," said the other. "River towns are always congested. It's a mixed population. The Danube washes the shores of seven countries. We get all kinds."

As the American bent to his fragrant dish his companion said: "The famous exile, Prince John Sarvanarof, was on your boat."

Crossdale ate his goulash. "I'm glad you find it to your taste."

"It's all right—perfectly good stuff."

"What does the United States think about Karmania?" The naivete with which this question was put amused Crossdale. He finished his goulash; the man removed the tureen and his plate.

"To tell you the truth the United States is thinking about itself just now. We've got a few questions of our own to

settle. We've been doing the altruistic act for the last five years; now it's home and mother for the U. S. A."

His companion laughed musically. "I dare say," he said, "that few people over there have ever heard of Karmania."

"You're right," said Crossdale. "They wouldn't know whether it was a fruit or a bird if you put it up to them. I hope that doesn't offend you?"

Before the American, on a piece of fragrant cedar board, lay a juicy piece of steak, a bit of perfection to tempt a hungry man. The Karmanian poured into his green glass a honey-like liquid and onto that the crystals of ice-cold seltzer.

"And that little jazz band—" from the other corner came the crying and appealing music which apparently was playing now to the man in gray linen and Crossdale alone, for the room had cleared "—that band could play anywhere in the United States and fill the house! I wonder why we haven't got that little bunch of troubadours!"

He drank his wine. It filled him with the sense of the joy of life. Above his head the fans were agreeably rotating. The violinist, a boy not more than twenty years of age, his violin tucked under his chin, came stealing, slipping, gliding on soft red shoes, close to the American's elbow.

"What shall I give him

Who comes so far and so gladly?

A gift for a stranger—

A gift for a rider—"

"I'm glad," said his vis-a-vis in a low tone, "that you approve—that you like what you have seen of Karmania and heard of it and tasted of it. Karmania has a great future, a great past and a great Queen."

As the man in gray linen said the word "Queen" he rose to his feet sharply, with a click of his heels, and lifted high in the air his little glass of white wine, saying aloud in an impressive voice: "*Heljen!*" It was impressive, it was picturesque, and Crossdale liked it. Here was evidently a good servant of the autocratic monarch!

"If I am not indiscreet, what has brought you to Karmania? What are you interested in?"

"Cinema films," said the American, "and gypsy bands. Those people over there play wonderfully. I am going to get them to emigrate."

The man was leaning confidently across the table to Crossdale; he smiled cleverly and laughed. He turned his huge emerald round, so that the light lay ruddy on it. Then in a very low tone he said, straight into the engineer's eyes: "I saw you on the Danube boat—you were talking to Prince John, and since you are apparently a friend of his, you will be interested in tonight's issue of the 'Tamaresk Whistle.'"

From his pocket he took a copy of a pink evening news sheet, covered with the hieroglyphic printing. "I dare say you don't read Karmanian," he said indulgently, and began to translate glibly for Crossdale's benefit:

"Prince John Sarvanarof is back in the Balkans, has had the daring to return after four years' absence. He will probably pass through Tamaresk tonight. He will not be permitted to remain twenty-four hours, and his arrest is looked for momentarily."

Crossdale listened and when the man had finished reading, met his eyes without any change of expression in his own. The Karmanian folded up the pink paper and said, always

in the same impressive undertone: "I shall say to you what I should have said to Mr. Stephen Crossdale, of San Francisco, if he had happened to come in tonight: If you are going into the interior, don't touch intrigue or politics."

"Thank you," said Crossdale coolly, "I quite believe they would be dangerous in your part of the world. Now, for instance, the chap who started to tunnel the Karmanians—he got it in the back, didn't he?"

"Baumgarten, the engineer?" said the other man slowly. "No one ever knew quite what happened to Baumgarten, but he was a very unwise young man. He meddled in politics, and it proved bad for his heart."

Crossdale helped himself to a fat cigarette—Prince John's type, with the arms of Karmania on the white paper in gold.

"You ought to make your country more attractive to tourists! They are trying to hand round a story in the United States that European travel is unpleasant. If you are going to add to the joys of the railroad trains assassination and political intrigue, forced on you whether you want it or not, take it from me, you will keep a lot of people out." He laughed.

The Karmanian poured into Crossdale's glass some golden-colored liquor of a rich, oily substance, with a nutty aroma. "*Rekal* Try it—the national drink. Americans who are used to alcohol won't mind a little *reka*."

"Not in the least." The American tasted it, liked it and finished it. "I dare say I shall want to smuggle a case or two back to our dry old country."

The other man laughed, watching Crossdale's indifference to the hot, fiery liquid, which must have burnt his throat like liquid flame.

"Have some more?" he asked, amused.

"I'll wait until my internal organs are properly introduced to this first glass. It's some little drink, all right!" The American put his glass down.

As he spoke, the native orchestra again fell into the bewitching tune of the Queen's song. Its measured melody rocked his senses like a cradle. He was beginning to feel the wines, the amber white wine and this last biting alcohol.

"What shall be given

To him who comes riding

Over the mountains and through the forests—"

"One of the Queen's new folk songs," said the man in gray linen. "You heard it on the boat?" Crossdale nodded.

"They are mad about her music and her songs all over the Kingdom."

Crossdale was determined not to ask any questions of anybody in Karmania. His companion who had drunk little, was, however, confidential. "The Queen is interested in everything that concerns her kingdom. There has been no sovereign like her since the days when women were really great—not another woman her equal in any court of Europe. She rules by wisdom, and the people worship the dust under her feet." The man was convincing. The American looked at him, very much impressed by his enthusiasm.

"She is the most beautiful woman in Europe," said the Karmanian. "And that mad seditious man whom you saw on the boat is a fanatic, dangerous beyond words, and if you value your personal safety, avoid him."

Crossdale had picked up the bill the waiter had put at his side and looked at it helplessly, at its undecipherable figures. As the man opposite took it from his hand, he heard

the noise of scuffle, confusion of voices without the door, and he recognized Jeff Robinson's honest tones. The next moment the negro was pushed into the room by two huge Karmanians in uniform. It would have taken an expert to have discovered that they were policemen.

Breathless, badly shaken, hatless, evidently culled by main force from some scuffle, Jeff panted: "Dere's de boss! Dere's de boss!"

Crossdale sprang to his feet and realized in an instant how serious this was, and how alone he was, how important everything he did just then was for them both; and he was angry and furious at this assault on Robinson. "What the devil, Jeff—"

The man in gray linen was occupying himself with the native policemen who fell off Jeff like dead flies.

"Wen' up to de Gran' Hotel, Boss, and lef' yo' grips. I asted dem fo' yo' letters an' de clerk give me a laugh an' said yo' mail had done been give out already. I called him a liar and a t'ief, boss, an' I soaked him on de jaw, an' nex' I knowed dese hyar policemen grabbed holt o' me. Nemmine me, boss, but somebuddy's done stole yo' mail."

The room swam. Crossdale wanted to get his fist in somebody's face. He had a sickening feeling that this big, yellow, brown-handed man of the emerald ring and the bracelet, the sailor collar and felt hat was at the bottom of it. He turned to him, white with anger.

"I want to telephone to Bukarest to the American representatives."

"I can't tell you," said the other man quietly, "how sorry I am that this should have happened."

Jeff Robinson gave him a withering look and turned and

went over to a little mirror on the wall which his ready eye had caught sight of, and scrutinized his battered cheek, murmuring: "I don' min' any li'l fight in a country where I can speak de langwidge! I met de German ban' in 'Frisco when it tried to play de national airs!"

The man in gray linen took a package from the table and handed Crossdale a thick yellow envelope, addressed to: "Mr. Stephen Crossdale; to be called for," the seals of the American Consulate unbroken. "This envelope was left yesterday by a Consular messenger for you at the Grand Hotel. You will find all your letters and wires inside."

The Karmanian turned his back on the engineer and bent to light a fresh cigarette, while Crossdale touched and looked at his voluminous correspondence; wires, letters, in familiar envelopes, with the Western Transportation Company's printing in the corner.

"Who are you?" he asked shortly. "Are you the King of Karmania, or just—" he stopped "—the Chief of Police?"

The Karmanian handed him a thick white envelope, sealed with a princely seal and addressed in a fine, distinguished handwriting: "Stephen Crossdale, Esq.; to be given by hand by Captain Refan Ugo," and the card in Crossdale's palm read: "Captain of the Karmanian Royal Fusiliers, First Secretary to the Cabinet of the Prime Minister."

"Why didn't you say that before?" he asked quietly, fixing his honest, fine eyes on the Slav.

The man bowed very respectfully and very politely. "Instructions, Excellency."

Crossdale looked over at Jeff, who had got some order out of his dishevelled appearance, and he said sternly to Refan Ugo: "I don't know anything about your instructions, from

whom they were, yet, though I expect I shall find out when I have read this letter. But if they included your beating up my man servant, I don't respect them and I don't like them, and it is up to you to fix things up with the clerk of the Grand Hotel. I'm going to stop there tonight and I expect to be treated properly, and that my man shall be treated properly too. It's up to you."

He put the letter in his pocket and went over and took his hat and stick. "Come along, Jeff. I hope we can get to the Grand Hotel without any more adventures."

Refan Ugo followed them, and no sooner were they without the door of the cafe, which closed upon them, than there in the moonlight, straight as lances, the moon shining on their casques, Crossdale saw drawn up a little posse of soldiers. Refan Ugo bore not the least grudge for Crossdale's natural anger. He put his hand through the American's arm. "Come, Mr. Crossdale," he said agreeably, "we'll all go on together. This little company of men will go along with us."

For just a second the engineer felt a slight sickening of his heart.

"Am I under arrest?" he asked.

"Heavens, no!" exclaimed the other man. "How dull I must be! You are under royal escort, Mr. Crossdale, and you're to have the best that the Kingdom can give you."

CHAPTER V

HE DISCOVERS HOW DANGEROUS IT IS SOMETIMES TO MAKE TOO GOOD A FIRST IMPRESSION

As they came up to the wretched little hostelry styled "Grand Hotel" Crossdale saw two officers in full tenue, waiting, and as their cortege came along, Refan Ugo was seized upon by these men and born off into a distant part of the hotel lobby. The American, thoroughly disgusted so far with everything, cast a disapproving glance in the direction of Ugo, went over to the lift and demanded of the sleepy servant to be shown upstairs to the rooms his man had engaged.

He was surprised and cheered to find himself shown to a comfortable, well lit room, with a cold supper laid out on the table. The hotel servant was followed by a porter with his valises. But Jeff, who was deeply plunged in gloom, cast a baleful look round the room.

"Boss," he said impressively, holding up his hand to the side of his mouth as the door closed behind the hotel servants, "Dis ain' no cibilisation!" (And this became Jeff's refrain in Karmania.) "Boss, I kin take care ob anyt'ing in a cibilised country, but dis am fierce."

"I dare say the clerk at the desk had something against your brand of civilisation, Jeff! Now unpack my valise, then get along to bed."

He was feeling somewhat better when Ugo came in in a

few seconds, and before he could speak, the American faced him, throwing up his fine head defiantly: "I'm waiting for you, Captain Ugo! I am not going to take another step in this business before you have answered me a question or two. I don't like your barbaric codes or your bandit customs. Now, I want to know, am I under arrest?"

Refan Ugo laughed comfortably, and threw his long length down on the hard little hotel sofa, stretching out his legs with nonchalance. "In no sense! Under arrest? What an idea, Excellency!"

"And let up on that Excellency stuff—I hate it!" But Refan Ugo was as smooth as oil, unruffled and serene, and there was something about his attitude that put the other's mind more at rest.

"Have a bit of cold bird?" He nodded at Jeff Robinson, protectingly. "We must make everything up to you, my man, in Karmania. I am sorry you had such a hot reception."

But Crossdale knew his man too well not to interrupt these apologies on the part of the Karmanian. "Come," he said sharply, to Jeff, "get along out, Jeff. I will have you called at the proper time for me in the morning."

As Jeff went out of the door, Refan Ugo pulled a little book-map out of his pocket, and as Storm had done in California, flung a map of Karmania down on the table. He was business-like and talked at lightning speed. Something had happened downstairs evidently to lighten him up, for his cheeks were bright. Crossdale watched him.

"You will have to leave here at six tomorrow morning, Excellency, *en route* for Cye. All is arranged for your journey. You will be charmed with the ride across the

steppes from here. Look—" with his long brown finger he indicated Tamaresk on the map, and the inward road, straight as the crow flies, the cross roads branching north and south, "at these cross roads you will meet my caravan, which will conduct you safely to Cye. There are no roads; there are only tracks, rough, primitive, after you leave the carriage. But it is a wonderful journey and very few strangers have ever taken it." Refan Ugo was expansive now and eager.

"How long a trail is it, anyway?" asked the Californian.

"To Cye two days' riding and one night *lusta*, as we call the road rests. You will sleep in a tent; you will have a guard, Excellency. Everything is prepared and waiting. Indeed, you are under royal escort."

Stephen Crossdale smiled. "Escort—that's the word, is it? Stands for arrest, doesn't it? What a little despot your queen is!" He hummed mockingly:

"What shall be given to

Him who comes riding....'

A prison cell and a stab in the back, eh? Tell it to the Bolsheviks, Ugo—they have got the handicap on you."

His companion put out his brown hand across the table and laid it on Crossdale's sleeve. "Excellency, don't be so suspicious. Before Her Majesty signed the order which permitted you to come from California to Karmania, we knew all about you."

"Fine!" said Crossdale. "You have got the advantage over me. But I'm going to find out!"

The other man, smiling at the American's suspicion, bore this agreeably. He rose. "You are tired, Excellency, and the night is short."

Crossdale did not stir. He shook his head.

"Not a bit of it! The night's not too short to talk a little yet, Ugo. I've got several questions to put before I caravan further to any circus. Sit down, will you?" The spy accepted and resumed his place in the corner of the sofa.

"I am sorry that I shall not be able to go in with you into the interior tomorrow myself, Excellency. The officers you noticed downstairs at the door have brought me orders; I am to remain in Tamaresk tomorrow in order to prepare the journey back to the capital for the Queen."

Crossdale lifted his brows. "The Queen? Is she in Tamaresk?"

"She arrives tonight from Paris, and as it happens, your caravan has exhausted for the present all my available traveling supplies."

"Don't you use motors in this part of the country?"

"No one is allowed to own a motor at present," returned the Karmanian. "Riot and sedition have made it too dangerous. The Queen herself owns the only motor that ever leaves Tamaresk for Cyé, and at the best a motor can only go a certain distance. After that there is only one method of crossing the steppes." Ugo reached out his hand and drew a bottle toward him and poured out glasses for his companion and himself. The American held it up to the light and looked into it.

"Well," he said slowly, "I don't know whether I am a darned fool or not, but I'm going to drink it. I dare say it's another brand of hell fire, but here goes." And over the top of the glass he said to Ugo: "To our better acquaintance, Captain Ugo."

When Refan Ugo left at three o'clock in the morning the American knew a great deal more about Karmania than when he hit the Balkans. The Slav had given him freely and frankly dope about the railroad, its partial construction, the political state of the kingdom, and a synopsis of the treachery and treason of Prince John Sarvanarof, former Prime Minister, brother to the King. This Prince, whilst exercising his functions of Premier, had brought the state close to anarchy and menaced the throne. But it was with a picture of the Queen herself that the young man fell asleep. He could almost see this woman of action, vigor and power, strangely and magnetically beautiful, who seemed deepset in the hearts of her people like a rich jewel.

The following morning he found in front of the door of the Grand Hotel a victoria, drawn by six horses and driven by a colossal Caucasian eunuch, dressed as though he had drifted out of some fancy ball. The valises were strapped on the back of the carriage. There was no one in sight to bid him God speed or farewell. Refan Ugo was not in sight, and before he could wonder whether he were properly started on his unknown way or not, the driver cracked his yards of thin whip and they were away.

Like this they raced through Tamaresk in the dawn, past Greek churches, their brilliant domes and crosses flaming in the sunrise; past blatant houses of pink and lavender and yellow stucco; through a town asleep.

Crossdale had always thought his man servant a big chap; he looked like a pigmy beside the Caucasian, who raced them out of the town, through the suburbs, along the

Danube for miles, and then straight towards the interior of the mysterious kingdom. As he looked back and saw Tamaresk blazing in the hot September morning, he felt that he was leaving the uttermost fringe of civilization behind him. They rushed through fertile farm lands, and before he had time to tire of the cradle-like motion of the carriage, tossed like a cockleshell along the road, the big man on the box drew his horses up before a wayside tavern, and loudly demanded: "*Reka! Reka!*" A glass of it was handed up to him; the horses were watered and they were off again, stopping once or twice to repeat these ceremonies.

They drove like this until noon. Then in the distance, a little spot on the broad expanse of the unbroken steppes, lay a shadow on the land, and the driver pointed with his whip. "The escort, Excellency." They had made good time; they were three hours ahead of their schedule, and as Crossdale looked at his map, he could not trace the direction he had come from or his route. As they came up to the little shadow on the plains and its form declared itself, he saw somewhere about fifty soldiers, standing at their horses' heads some of them, the others mounted, waiting. The caravan to conduct him to Cyé was a medley of type and color, and every man-jack of them was armed to the teeth. In cinder-gray uniform, soft felt hats, with bright feathers stuck through the black hat-bands, they were far and away the most business-like looking group of men that he had seen in this romantic country.

The driver drew his six horses back like dogs. Two men were at the hood of the victoria, unstrapping the luggage. Jeff had climbed down wearily, and Crossdale got out, looking for some one to come up and introduce himself as

Lieutenant Korvan, who, Refan Ugo had informed him, was to command the caravan. He looked in vain. He began in the dialect in which he had spoken to Sarvanarof and got no further than: "*Skarervaro . . .*" looking from face to face. Before he could frame another syllable, his arms were seized from the back; he was trussed in a moment from neck to ankle, tight as a pullet. In another moment his eyes were deftly and tightly bandaged from behind.

He heard an oath from Jeff and surmised that he had met the same reception. The voice at his side said, in fairly good English, apparently learned in the States: "There is a six-hour ride before us. We know his Excellency is a good rider. Will his Excellency ride free and blindfolded, or will he be carried between two soldiers, as his Excellency's servant is to be transported?"

The American was so hot with fury, and so helpless, that he could hardly speak. "Curse you! Ride to where?"

"That cannot be told his Excellency."

"I will ride free, if it is to hell!" and he called out: "Hallo, Jeff!"

And his relief was enormous when the answer came back from the negro: "All right, boss! Never min' me! What did Ah tell yo' 'bout cibilisation?"

His master's sense of humor, strong even in this moment, made him laugh grimly. "By God!" he exclaimed, turning his blindfolded face from side to side, "if any harm comes to that black servant of mine—" And he stopped. Of what avail were his threats?

He found a horse's back between his legs and the feel of a good English saddle. His stirrups were adjusted and a bridle was put between his fingers. And like this, un-

conscious of where he went—east, west, north or south—the American rode till sundown. After a short dash across the level, during which time he realized what sight means, his horse began to climb and climb and climb, and the air to grow heavy and sweet with spice and balm. He never spoke and no one spoke to him. They all rode silently. There were the blows of big cravache, the crying to the horses in the low Oriental fashion, the noise of the rolling gravel and the little intense hoofs gripping, climbing, finding their footing.

When he had done six hours in the saddle they came clattering upon a paved enclosure, stones of some courtyard or street—how could he know? Then the group of riders broke into sound. There were cries and calls, shouts of greeting and other shouts further off, and a cheer of: "*Sava, sava Jehanos!*" weird, beautiful, barbaric, something between a prayer and a wail.

He was off his horse, and directed and led by two soldiers, still blindfolded, conducted into some building or other; he felt the stones under his feet, and then the hard wood of the flooring of the house. He went up long, long flights of stairs, without protest, to either death or momentary liberty. What did he know? Finally he heard a door close; his bandage was whipped from his eyes and he blinked into a small tower room, candle-lit and hung with tapestries and flags. Before him, lying on a couch, covered by rugs, with head bandaged and his right arm in a sling, was Prince John Sarvanarof. Half sitting up, he waved his left hand gallantly, smiling with an amusement which his visitor thought sardonic.

"Good evening. I told you we should meet again!"

Between his two guards, rigid as the dead, Stephen Crossdale glared at his captor, white to the lips. "I am heartily sorry to have dragged you up here like this, but you would not have come otherwise, you know, and I was desperate to see you. All is fair under certain circumstances, and it is a poor workman who does not use the tool in his hands, especially when he knows its temper and its metal! You're a sport, and they tell me that that servant of yours is a sport also."

If Sarvanarof was an impressive figure in the candle-light, supine and bandaged, Crossdale was more impressive, pale and furious, with his blue eyes so full of fire as to be almost red. He loved his life and he determined to make a desperate fight for it. Prince John nodded to the guards.

"Set Mr. Crossdale free."

The young man said between his teeth, thickly: "If you do, I will be at your throat, Sarvanarof."

The Prince laughed. "I believe you would," he said, "and I will wait until you have decided for yourself what you want to do. But we could talk more agreeably if you were a bit more comfortable."

"I am all right," said the American, "as I am—and safer, so far as you are concerned. Now, it's up to you to explain this, Prince John."

"You are no fool. You love your life; you don't want to die here in a mysterious way in this hidden hole in the Balkans?"

"If everything you say is as true as that, you will be talking Gospel."

"It is now seven o'clock. You came here from the point where my people found you in about six hours. It will take

you little more than half that time to go back—it is down grade—and you will have a sure-footed horse. I have a rendezvous at midnight in the same place where you left your traveling carriage.” Sarvanarof touched his head and his arm. “I have been hurt—no matter how. I cannot meet my appointment.”

Crossdale waited, listening, watching, prepared for anything, and said sullenly: “What’s the dope? What have I got to do with your infernal rendezvous and meetings?”

“I want you to go in my place.”

“What the deuce do you want me to do that for?”

“My soldiers who came up with you are rebels. They have rallied round my flag and they love me. They are all recruits from the Karmanian Army. They are desperate; they will follow their leader anywhere.”

“So I see—they are following you to hell, all right!”

The other went on. “They are ignorant barbarians, the lowest class of men; each one more reckless than the other. They are not pleasant to deal with; they have to be mastered, tyrannized. They are a type of which revolutionaries are made and republics have been carved and moulded by hands such as theirs.”

“Go on,” said Crossdale nodding, “call them any old names you like—I shan’t object.”

“But,” said the Prince passionately, “I have not a single person near me whom I can send on this delicate mission.”

The American waited. The Prince made a slight gesture of command and both guards stepped out, leaving him alone with Crossdale. It was a curious picture, the man wounded, partially helpless, and the other bound.

“Queen Karmen Mara arrived in Tamaresk last night,”

said the Prince. "She is now on her way by motor to Cye, with her sister, the Princess Mariska. They will pass your point tonight at midnight. You will be there with my soldiers; you will meet the Queen's motor; you will bring the Queen here to me at Jehanospelz."

The young American threw back his head and laughed aloud. "You are too good to be true! Not on your tintype, Prince John! You have got another guess coming to you!"

The Prince, perfectly quiet and unmoved, continued: "If you refuse you will watch from this window the departure of these men—rough, unprincipled, half-drunken brigands—for they will go down with no leader but one of their own kind to meet the Queen. She will not fancy such an escort. It will not be pleasant company for women to travel in between midnight and dawn."

Prince John stopped, watching his man. "They're half drunk, all of them, with *reka*, and the sight of beauty, two unprotected women—"

"My God!" exclaimed Crossdale, his breast heaving. "You human devil!"

"No," said the Prince quietly, "I am no devil at all. The Queen of Karmania is dearer to me than she can ever be to any living man. I am a patriot—my country and the republic! I have no other credo."

The American spoke with difficulty; his voice threatened to go back on him; but he said: "And if I accomplish this picture-book deal, and bring her here, what will happen to her?"

"She shall be kept here," said Prince John, "as an honored guest, held here until the republic is firmly established."

"Oh," said the young man furiously, "you talk like a book! And what will happen to me, by the way, when I have brought the Queen of Karmania here to you?"

"Well," said the Prince, "you will remain, too, at Jehanos-pelz. You will see the glories of the new republic. I will give you an official position and you will complete the railroad; or if you prefer, I will give you a safe-conduct out of the country and you can return to the United States." Here one of the castle bells rang out eight, long, vibrant pealing tones.

"Come," said Prince John, "come, Crossdale, you will have to go at once if you are going to be in time. Otherwise she will be alone on those steppes, and they are not cheerful after midnight."

"I say," said Crossdale practically, "you don't expect me to believe that the Queen of Karmania is motoring alone from Tamaresk into that desert I have just left, without a proper escort?"

"She is doing just this," said Prince John. "She expects to meet Refan Ugo's caravan; the caravan that will meet her will be mine, as it was my caravan which met you."

Crossdale never once asked what the alternative would be for him if he refused. He had a plan in his mind; his train was laid. He stirred in his bonds.

"If what you say is true," he said, in as commonplace a voice as he could summon, "it would be rotten to leave a woman there alone. Your politics are nothing to me, out here. I am more democratic than anything else, anyway. And, as you put it so pleasantly, I have no choice. But what is going to happen to my black man servant? We both go down, or I will sell my hide with his."

Prince John was searching him keenly. "You are a dead-game sport. I liked you on the boat!"

"Tell your people to fix me up something to eat in the saddle, and give me something to drink, too—I am thirsty as the deuce. None of that damned *reka* stuff, either! I am not a fire-eater—it is good enough for your soldiers."

Although Prince John had made no apparent gesture, the door was opened and the guards came back. "Take Mr. Crossdale to the gun room. Arm him; give him pistols and what he wants. Give him a pouch with bread and cheese and a bottle of wine. I put you, Crossdale, in the hands of my own personal servant, the chap who spoke to you when you got out of the victoria. He understands your kind of dialect and speaks English."

Prince John had animated. His eyes were sparkling. "You are superb," he said to Stephen. "You come of a free country and you are a worthy son of the republic."

The young man thrust his head out, but he did not move to spring on the Prince—he had other plans. "Don't you speak of my country to me! In the United States you would be strung up to a lamp-post and riddled with bullets! Now for my man, Prince John. We don't desert each other in the place I come from. Both of us, or we will leave our bones here. He is my servant and he follows on."

CHAPTER VI

CROSSDALE'S GLASS IS SMALL BUT IT IS
HIS OWN AND HE DRINKS FROM IT

Half an hour later Crossdale left Jehanospelz, the leader of fifty good men and true, riding at their head in the brilliant moonlight, the golden light penetrating the forest, covering the hills, down whose dark sides they clattered. Crossdale experienced the singular sensation of retracing with untrammelled sight the road over which he had gone blindfolded an hour or so before. They descended a hill peak, one of the tufa-like little mountains which had fascinated him from the Danube boat. Back of him, the mediæval tower of Jehanospelz, which the daring revolutionary Prince had made his stronghold, rose above the pines. No visitor was ever more glad to get away from an unchosen host, and he blessed the good fortune which had sent him forth again. No matter toward what he rode, he was turning his back on the Prince and his tower. The light lingered, blending with the moonshine, silvering them as they rode.

Jeff Robinson began the pilgrimage alongside of his master, but the negro soon fell back to the rear and his master forgot him.

The mountain trail was ugly enough, but to any one accustomed to rough riding there was nothing unusual in its precipitous descent, along sheer precipices, filled with moonshine, down into whose depths pebbles clattered from their horses' hoofs. Sticking like a burr to Crossdale and stick-

ing as well like a burr to his little red stallion, the Karmanian detailed by Prince John to conduct the expedition rode on Crossdale's left. Stephen had been on fire for the adventure from the moment that Sarvanarof outlined it in the tower, and an idea which nothing but death would dislodge took possession of him; a bullet alone could shoot this spark out of his brain.

He adored the night ride on his first-rate little horse; in spite of the fact that success or failure meant his own life, if not that of a woman, he could not but respond to the fascination and spirit of the ride. The air grew cold, and it came refreshing and vivifying, strong with the scent of balsam and cedar; and back of him the fifty revolutionary riders rode like Tartars. They had taken an oath of good faith to Crossdale, pledged themselves to follow the American and to return with him to Jehanospelz.

He did not ask himself whether he had confidence in the weird ceremony in the courtyard under Prince John's window. He had confidence in himself and faith in his own intention, and he was taut as a fiddlestring, keen as a sword, and rode calling on his lucky stars.

The fellow at his side was a vulgar little Karmanian, low-browed, beady-eyed, short-legged, and with a rolling voice like a little thunder storm in his throat. Stephen had observed him intently in Prince John's tower. The Prince had called him immediately, confiding the American to his special care, giving him minute directions, and as Crossdale listened, he realized how essential the man's good will was. As Prince John talked, Crossdale noted the impression the leader made upon his servant. Captain Zito received his orders in an ugly silence, like a thorough discontent.

After an hour or so the little group of riders came pelting out of the forest, like so much gray shot, and took the open. Before them the limitless moonlit silence spread, and Crossdale saw with satisfaction the forest disappearing behind them. The horses settled down to a run, whilst the riders crouched low in their saddles like Indians. He could not help smiling at the thought of poor old Jeff going the pace for life and death. There was nothing in sight on the face of the steppes, no shrub or tree, only moonlight pouring over the pink land. He heard over and over again the "*Aara, aara, ra, ra,*" the native order from the throats of the soldiers to their beasts.

How they rode! He drank in moonlight, seemed to swallow it, with the fine dust thrown up to them from the pelting hoofs of the little stallions; and for the first time perceived the subtle perfume of the plains. After a little he drew his horse up and called to his companion: "Stop, Zorba (chief). I want to drink!"

Captain Zito started at Crossdale's authoritative tone; he recognized the voice of a superior, of a man used to command. He threw back over his shoulder a guttural order, and the troop brought their horses to a halt.

Crossdale drank from the bottle in his pocket and ate something from his pouch. He looked back past the rude, Slav faces to find Jeff Robinson. It would have taken a good deal to have impressed him, however, in this moment of excitement; even Jeff's disappearance would have moved him little. But he saw the negro hugging his saddle, clinging like a crab to his mount, white as Crossdale, very nearly, powdered with dust. He was a spectacle which at another time would have made his master roar with laughter.

"Buck up, Jeff! Pray for luck! Captain Zito," he said sharply to the Karmanian, "let's get on."

As they rode together, never turning to look at the other man, but throwing out his words to him, he said: "I picked you out in the tower, when your chief was giving you orders. You're a good chap—not the kind of man to be led, however; you should lead."

Zito listened, then rose in his saddle to scan the plains, in search of the point where the Queen's motor should appear. Crossdale understood, and there came to him an intense desire to protect this woman, whose reputation for beauty and intelligence and goodness had already given her, to him, a strong personality. What a weird kick of Fate to cast him in the middle of a Balkan desert to kidnap a Queen!

Zito this time drew his horse down and called halt, and pointing with his short arm out into the moonlight: "There, there, Excellency, Lord!"

Under the moon, not three miles away, Crossdale saw a fleck, a speck. A cold chill struck him, for the thing was beginning to take reality and form, a question of life, perhaps death! In that little object that looked like a black beetle on a pancake, was a woman, at the mercy of these men!

"That is the Queen's motor, Excellency, Lord. She has two outriders and the man on the box with the chauffeur—four people, and all ours." He laughed. But his laugh was not mirthful; it was rather bitter and sardonic.

Crossdale said: "And Captain Refan Ugo's escort?"

"Excellency, Lord, her Majesty has been driven twenty miles out of her way, as you were driven."

For lack of something to say, in order to collect his

thoughts for a moment, the American said: "These mounts of ours, Zito—are they good for the return trip?" Again the Karmanian's little bubbling chuckle.

"They could ride to hell and bring back the devil's wife, Excellency, Lord."

"Ah," thought Crossdale deeply, "thank God I did not let him go alone to meet a woman, the damned Greaser!"

The escort of the Queen had seen the advancing riders. The distance between them could be made in a quarter of an hour. There was not a moment to lose. Crude, clumsy as his plan might be, it was his chance, and he would take it, if it meant that the soldiers riddled him with bullets from the guns slung across their backs! Crossdale had not learned Karmanian dialect at his nurse's knee for nothing. He was a born leader, an inspirer, and he believed in fate. Why had he been sent, not these fellows alone, in this dramatic fashion, if not to corrupt them, to entrain them for his own ends? He murmured, as though to encourage himself, under his breath: "*Heljen!*"

"Zito!" In Karmanian the word "listen" has a flexible meaning. It means: "Hear and be blessed"; it means also; "Hear and be cursed"; it is also a strong and powerful command, and as Crossdale said it now, out on the Karmanian plain, it seemed to ring to the little captain like the sound of steel. "Zito, listen!" Crossdale touched his fellow rider on the breast, which was as well a Karmanian custom, impelling respect and putting in a way a seal upon the other. "Listen, you are out for success, cut out for greatness, Brevol! But you are on the wrong track. Listen, then help me to talk to these fellows."

Crossdale ventured a bold hypothesis. It had been born in Prince John's tower.

"Zito, I know you hate the Prince. You are sick of him and his revolution. If you carry out his plan tonight, you know as well as I do that you will be a marked man for the Royalists, and more than likely the Prince will put you out of the way, so that you may tell no tales. Listen! I shall never go back to Jehanospelz, and you shall never go back!"

He could not have told any one the sum and substance of his impassioned words to this man, the words which he said into Zito's eyes, at first sullen, then more and more human under his spell. He never remembered what note he struck and hammered on. He appealed to greed, vanity, patriotism; raked up ideals; hurled words in low hot tones, half English, half in dialect. He swayed the fellow. The fifty good men and true paid little attention to them, glad to munch and drink and smoke, waiting for orders in their saddles. They were those who follow, not those who lead—ignorant, low-minded, half-dazed with *reka*. Crossdale promised gold from America, safe-conduct to the great Republic. He spoke of Queen's rewards.

Zito had been impressed by Crossdale from the moment he had bound him hand and foot and blindfolded him on these selfsame plains. The American's attitude before Zito's prince, his pale dignity, his courage, had impressed and charmed the volatile temperament of the Slav.

And he *did* hate Sarvanarof. He had been a petty officer in the Queen's regiment and had gone over to the revolutionary forces, deserting from the army after a severe punishment for some small offence. He was homesick for Savia and his peasant wife, disgruntled and ripe for a new desertion. The Prince indeed had ill-chosen his representative!

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Zito said, his eyes on the eager American: "Lord, Excellency, I am only one man! There are forty-nine of them, but I think I know them. They are good boys, Excellency, Lord. I shall speak to them. And when I stop you will follow. Speak not long. Let us catch them hot. And when I strike you on the breast—speak!"

Crossdale had never been so excited in his life. He watched the little captain wheel; he heard him call out the same word that Crossdale had so worked for all it was worth; "*Grado!* Listen!" And then he heard the harangue, saw Zito's fierce, energetic gestures, his working hands in the air, hands that beat his own breast. He saw him crane his short neck out and spit on the ground, rising in his stirrups. He watched the man's excited appeal, which he could not follow or understand, then looked from one to another of the soldiers' faces—heavy, sullen, unilluminated, and he could not tell if they were inclined to hew down Zito and himself, or follow them.

He heard an appeal to them for loyalty to the Queen, return to old customs, call for the desertion of Prince Sarvanarof, the revocation of their pledged word. And when Zito smote him on the breast, not any too gentle a blow, Crossdale was ready. He too stood up in his stirrups, cried out: "*Heljen, Las Rena!*"

He waited for the men to turn on him and shoot him down. What would keep them from it? Only the curious tide which sways mobs by sudden force and passion. Before he could be disappointed by an ominous silence on the part of the soldiers, or by their bursting into a cry of: "*Sava Jehanos!*" he made a short, eager appeal in the dialect, gathering together everything he could remember of

the words he had learned so long ago. They would be lords; they would be rich. And he cried so earnestly the viva and hail of this sovereign of a country he did not know that the men broke into a storm of cheering, and the Queen's escort, half a mile away, heard the: "*Heljen! Heljen!*" filling the still night air, and returned it. Lights of excitement and exhilaration scintillating in his brain, the American wheeled with Zito and rode off in the direction of the Queen's motor; the fifty good men and true hot on their heels.

There in the center of the plain, like a plum in a cake, a fly on an amber mirror, not to be mistaken for a shrub or a tree, stood that civilized vehicle of transportation—a motor-car. Crossdale could see on the box a chauffeur and another man, which last sprang off and came round and stood with two other guards. He had been assured that the servants were spies of the revolutionary Prince. Things were coming along! This was reality and the rest a dream.

Stephen Crossdale, of San Francisco, U. S. A., in the crux of an extraordinary situation, in a few moments would take his place among the melodramatic heroes: "The Man Who Saves a Queen!" "The Democratic Yankee Who Put a Spoke in the Wheel of a Petty Revolution!" And so forth. Honors, publicity. Gosh! How it would read in a home paper.

But the honors did not say a single thing to Stephen Crossdale, whose good sense and a hatred of the ridiculous would not let him lose his head. He tapped Captain Zito on the breast. "Zito, you are the true chief here. This is your job. It is your country and your Queen. Gad, man, it is your chance to cut ice for yourself! I am not the chap to

take your glory." He pushed forward the little Karmanian. "Go on—tell your Queen any old lie you like, but, my boy, keep me out of it. Understand?" He looked hard into the eyes of the little fellow, who saw that the American meant what he said.

"Tell her that you've recanted, your men are solid for you, you've saved her from abduction. Ask pardon, safe-conduct. Go along, Zito—it is a great, great bit of luck for you, old boy. We'll clatter along behind you until we meet Captain Ugo and his tribe."

At these words the other's expression changed. He muttered: "Um—um—Ugo and his people—safe-conduct—pardon—"

Crossdale insisted, driving him toward the motor.

"Get along—Queens should never wait! Cry a lot of '*Heljens!*'—we'll chorus you. But mind, don't you peep my name." Now Crossdale caught the Karmanian by the arm. "I am the type of man who keeps my word," he said quietly. "If you say nothing whatsoever about me to the Queen of Karmania, I will not betray your chief."

"Excellency," said the Karmanian, speaking very quickly and with more feeling than Crossdale had seen him yet display, "swear you will not betray us!"

"You bet I won't!" said Crossdale peacefully. "I do not intend to get mixed up with your politics."

Zito lifted Crossdale's hand to his forehead; he spat on the ground between them, saying: "That is a blood sign in Karmania, *between you and me.*"

And he started off toward the motor. Crossdale walked slowly back, with his bridle on his arm, sincerely pleased. He had won a victory and he was keeping in the background.

Captain Zito was welcomed by a murmured: "*Sava!*" or "*Heljen!*"—How the devil could Crossdale tell? He could see the little group round the motor. In the interval between his impassioned harangue of the fifty good men and true, Crossdale fell from his transcendent pinnacle. He felt secure in the probability of a good performance. The Queen of Karmania was no longer in danger of being kidnapped—on this occasion, at all events. She would not be called upon to show her pluck and her courage; she would not ride blindfolded, ignominiously, between himself and Captain Zito, and he fondly believed that Prince John would not entertain the royal visitor at Jehanospelz tonight. So far, so good. He was gratified, but did not relish being in the limelight.

He could see a woman's face at the motor window. The door was opened. He could see Captain Zito bend almost double, a very profound salutation for a revolutionary leader. Crossdale smiled. How capricious in their phases the human sentiments are! The little company of Prince John's men were contentedly smoking, apparently satisfied with their sudden transition from hot-handed outlawry to the role of protectors of their Sovereign. Crossdale heard them break into the music of the Queen's last song:

"What shall we give to the rider?"

It came to him hoarsely from the throats of these ruffians, but it had a certain rolling, rich beauty, and seemed fitting at the moment. The Queen who had created the words and the music must have thrilled. It had its thrill for Crossdale. What would have happened to Queen Karmen Mara if he had not been knocked down and overpowered by Prince John's men, and then constituted himself her champion? In an incredibly short time Captain Zito returned.

Crossdale saw the chauffeur start the car, the footman climbed back on the box, and with a guard on either side the motor turned and moved rapidly off, retracing its road.

Captain Zito rode up to them quickly, wheeled, screamed out an order to his men, which Crossdale did not quite follow, but the men sprang to their saddles. The Karmanian leaned over and struck Crossdale's horse and the lot of them galloped at breakneck speed after the Queen's motor. Zito had changed, his tenor had altered; there was a great transformation in the little chief. Now he turned to Crossdale a hang-dog, sullen little face, chopping out his words.

"I don't know what devil's spell you cast over me, back there in the woods! When I got to the motor door I came to my senses! The Queen frightened me to death; she is so high, so cold. I could not speak to her. I saw she could never have forgiven me. She would have had us all shot. And what am I—Zito Terowitz, of a butcher's family, a deserter, a peasant—to speak to a Queen? I saw what a fool you had made of me and what a double traitor I had been!"

They were riding fast as the Karmanian spoke, in his broken English, mingled with the dialect. The lights on the back of the motor were little red stars to follow. They had twenty miles of road to retrace in order to regain the point at which their route had been misdirected. But Crossdale was quite certain that Ugo's caravan would come out to meet them.

"If my chief does not murder me when I return," said Captain Zito, "I will keep you under surveillance whilst you are in Karmania. So long as you hold your faith with us and don't betray the Prince, you will be safe. Karmania is full of our people, and if you betray Jehanospelz, you will

meet the same fate as Baumgarten met at the hands of the royalists."

"Shut up!" said the Californian. "When a man of my type gives his word he keeps it. I have not three or four masters, as you have. I have one word. And at all events, the Queen has been put on the right road—that is all I care for."

Zito and Crossdale exchanged no further word between them. The Karmanian was full of remorse and anger and hot to be back on the homeward trail. They kept the motor in sight for a certain time and then Zito called a halt, and they waited in silence. It was a bad quarter of an hour for Crossdale. The moon was waning. Finally, in the far distance, beyond the almost indistinguishable pin point that the motor had become, they could discern a blotch on the plain, the caravan of Refan Ugo.

The captain of the fifty good men and true became a screaming Tartar. He did not give his orders; he hurled them forth at the men whom he himself now dominated anew. Crossdale and his negro servant were torn from their saddles. They took Jeff fighting like a bull; but Crossdale's fight would have been barehanded against fifty men, for his pistol was ripped from his hip-pocket; and they bound Jeff and himself hand and foot again, and left them lying on the plain.

Captain Zito, standing in front of him, spat again upon the ground and made the sign of the Cross over the American. As he stood, glowering, above the man whom he had overpowered, there was fury and passion on his face, but no dislike. "There is an oath between us," he said. "Refan Ugo's people will find you. Keep your word."

Crossdale heard them go riding off to their savage and impressive cry, now once more that of the revolutionary party: "*Sava, sava, Jehanos!*" The sound of their going had not yet died upon the air before the four men who had accompanied the motor of the Queen came tearing past the two men lying upon the ground. They rushed by like the wind. Leaning down out of their saddles, they jeered and laughed at these strangers, whom their chief had made the sport of them all. They tore past to join their companions.

When there was no longer any sound to break the impressive silence, when Crossdale could no longer hear any evidence of the presence of either his enemies or a company of rescue, he called out to Jefferson Robinson: "Hallo there, Jeff!"

He had no doubt whatsoever that they would be found and picked up, but perhaps not for hours.

"Boss! I say, Boss!" The negro whispered in a sepulchral and guarded tone, as though his poor voice could make any impression on that vast unbroken silence, or whether it mattered who heard, "Did my eyes deceive me, or did I see a motor kyar standing in de middle of this hyar wilderness?"

"Yes, you certainly saw a first rate flivver, Jeff."

"Well, suh, Mr. Crossdale, why didn't we get aboard?"

"Well, because we're not Kings, Jeff."

The negro gasped. His voice was something between a sob and an effort to be as plucky as his master. "Well, I reckon we done missed de last car tonight, Boss. I reckon it's an even chance that we ever get back to civilization."

"I guess that's right, Jeff," said his master. "Could you roll over to me and get me a cigarette out of my breast-pocket with your teeth?"

CHAPTER VII

TO ALWAYS KEEP IN MIND THE REASON FOR ONE'S
JOURNEY AND TO BE ABLE TO FORGET THE INN BEDS
ARE TWO OF THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE GOOD TRAVELER

The thing which amused Crossdale above all else was the way in which he fell into and fell out of his adventure without causing the least sensation in Karmania. The fact that he had effected the escape of the sovereign of the country from abduction by her rebellious subjects passed Crossdale did not know into what annals, certainly into none that he ever expected to read. The fact that the engineer of the new Karmanian State Railway, who had come from the U. S. A. to work for the Government, lay trussed like an ignominious turkey for hours on the cold face of the Karmanian steppes—until the morning dew penetrated his bones and threatened to lay the seeds for a jolly good attack of inflammatory rheumatism, to say the least—cut no ice at all in the minds of the Karmanians, as far as he could tell.

In the morning Refan Ugo's search party gathered him up like an unimportant mass of sacking or a bag of coffee, released and untied him and his man servant, and drove them in a mule cart to the famous crossroads from which his route and that of the Queen of Karmania had deviated twenty-four hours before. Except for the cords which had bound Jeff and himself, and which were frugally rolled up in

the back of the mule cart; except for a stiff, bruised, numb condition of back and limbs, and a feeling in his heart of mingled disgust, amusement and triumph, there was nothing left to Crossdale of his first experience in the Kingdom.

He was scarcely in a fit condition then to appreciate the originality of Refan Ugo's caravan, waiting to meet the rescuing mule cart, with which he should have joined up the day before. He had never traveled with anything that looked like it, however, before. Two horses, with English saddles, the only commonplace objects in the group of some hundred soldiers and servants, waited beside tents of yellow canvas at the crossroads between Tamaresk and Cye, —between, Crossdale could have informed them, Tamaresk and the rebel army at Jehanospelz; but no doubt they knew it quite as well as he did.

At rest, busily feeding on bunches of grass, conveniently adjusted where they could bite into it and devour it to the last spear, a group of long-tailed, under sized splendid little stallions, with native saddles of red and green and blue leather, flanked the encampment. Close to his beast, either cross-legged in front of him, or standing patiently by the saddle, were the riders, in full trousers, soft wrinkled boots, and brodered jackets and tarbushes. Many of the horses carried bright colored boxes of blue and yellow, painted with extraordinary skill with religious pictures or scenes from the history of the Karmanian republic and monarchy.

A bit further on was a detachment of the Queen's Guard, in myrtle green, a color whose tone and quality Crossdale grew to know well. The group, gay, barbaric, colorful and decorative, might have been rubbed into existence by Aladdin with his lamp. The officer in command came up to the

mule cart—from which Stephen Crossdale got out without assistance, and from which Jefferson Robinson was carried bodily, in profound slumber, from which nothing but a prolonged cry of "*Sava, sava, Jehanos!*" would have awakened him.

The Queen's officer came forward, affably, pleasantly, with an expression on his face which Crossdale scarcely knew whether to find humorous or sarcastic. He stood stiffly and saluted with the back of his hand pressed against his forehead. He said to the American, in excellent English:

"I am Lieutenant Stanislas Korvan, of the Queen's Guard, Mr. Crossdale. I bring the compliments and apologies of Captain Ugo. He is on duty with the escort of the Queen. He is sorry not to be here."

"By Jove!" thought the American to himself. "If that is all he is going to say about it, he won't get anything more from me!" And he returned curtly: "That's all right. See that my man is looked after, will you? What I am concerned about is my luggage. It did not leave Tamaresk with me; I understood it was to follow in a few hours." And he asked, as though it might have been checked from Boston to New York: "Have you heard anything of it? Has it turned up?"

The officer smiled under his close-cropped moustache. He liked Crossdale's nonchalance. He pointed to one of the little tents, which to Crossdale was the most inviting-looking thing he had ever seen. Sore as though he had been beaten, dirty and hungry, he wanted a bath, a bed, a clean shirt—in short, some of the attractions of the civilization for which Jeff had pined from the beginning. "Part of

your luggage is in the tent, Mr. Crossdale. The rest is strapped on the mules and will follow on."

Crossdale could see within the flap of the tent a military bed; there was a native kitchen in full play in the open, and he smelt food. If this Karmanian had not been such a total stranger and such a confounded stick, he would have slapped him on the back and wrung his hand in sheer content.

"This," said the officer, "is the best we can do on the plains. You will find hot water, and I dare say you can make shift for a wash-up."

Crossdale went into the little peaked room, dropped the tent flap behind him, and faced two of his valises and the preparations for a hot bath. Not one question had been asked him, not one remark had been made about his extraordinary entrance into the country. It puzzled him and made him mad. From that moment until they reached the village of Cyé, a night and two days' journey further on, he answered no questions and asked none of his traveling companion.

They journeyed the following day across the steppes, through a violet mist, covering the plains, and when the peculiar mirage lifted, Crossdale saw before him the foothills of the Karmanian ranges. Their rise had been gradual, and there was splendor in the heaven-sweeping mountains, climbing sheer from the lavender land into the sky. From crests to the foothills dark forests dropped their inky veils.

"See, Mr. Crossdale," said the young man riding by his side, "that is Mount Nepta, the highest peak in the Karmanian ranges, and at its base is the entrance of Baumgarten's tunnel, the entrance which he made on the Tamareks

side. Tomorrow you will sleep within a few miles of the point where poor Baumgarten's tunnel debouches."

Tunnels and royal State railways, the idea of matter-of-fact and every day engineering, came with a sudden shock to Crossdale, intoxicated as he was now with the open-air life and the fascination of his journey. The country was so beautiful and so weird. It seemed a crime to scar it with the lines of modern transportation and to break the silences with the toot of engines and the noise of steam. Crossdale could not take his eyes from the black curtain of forests. That curtain fell between him and Savia!

"The capital," his companion said, "is a jewel. It is the most beautiful city in the East."

"Every man's home town is good to him, Lieutenant Korvan," said Crossdale succinctly. "I have got a little ranch in California that does not need me to speak for it."

The young man bowed indulgently. "Wait, Mr. Crossdale," he said, "and see." And then Lieutenant Korvan asked his first question of his traveling companion. "You are a democrat?"

"To the backbone," said Crossdale stoutly. Whether this pleased Lieutenant Korvan or not he had no means of knowing.

"It will be well," said the Karmanian gently, "to disguise your republican fervor in Karmania. We are conservative." They were riding toward the village of Cye, already apparent in the distance in a cluster of yellow stucco houses, its little spirals of smoke rising on the air.

"I am a democrat," said Crossdale, "but I am not a politician, and I don't care a whoop about other people's

governments. But," he said frankly, lifting his fine head and meeting the eyes of his conductor, "I came across a very distinguished and interesting man on the Danube boat."

He waited. The Karmanian showed a polite but distinctly tentative interest. "He was your former Prime Minister," said the young man, "Prince John Sarvanarof."

"Ah, yes." Korvan nodded. "He is an exile. Before the war broke out he was Prime Minister—That, Mr. Crossdale," he pointed expressively, "is the village of Cyé."

It was sunset when the caravan drew up in front of the little inn on the single rustic street, whose narrow roadway led directly into the wide Karmanian plains. Some hundred canvas-covered stucco huts, their yellow walls hung with drying fruits, ears of scarlet corn, yellow chains of tiny tomatoes, clustered like jewels against the stucco; a white church dome, like a round moon against the dark forest; a ruined castle, with the town clustering round it like children at the knees of age; a thickly populated little mountain hamlet—this was Cyé, a little township like hundreds of others throughout the Balkans.

In front of the tavern, as the caravan drew up, the peasants were dancing and singing, whirling in their stiff skirts, and the tune the musicians were playing was familiar to Crossdale; it seemed to pursue him, to follow him everywhere.

"What shall be given
To him who comes riding...."

In lovely little Cyé Crossdale waited three days, figuratively kicking his heels against the inn walls, with nothing

more amusing to do than to study the peasant life from the inn terrace, observing the manners and customs of the half-barbaric, wholly delightful habitants, on their way from market to town and from town to their farms.

In a rude little room in the roof of the rude little inn in the heart of the warm hamlet, the perfume of the September fields around it, with a constant performance in the shape of singing and dancing going on in the inn yard from noon to midnight, Crossdale made better acquaintance with Lieutenant Korvan whilst waiting instructions. He liked reticence; he was reserved by temperament. But Lieutenant Stanislas Korvan rather overdid the noncommittal act. Crossdale was forced to take his cue from the young man. He was far too clever to put questions to this official which might be evaded, and yet he was Yankee enough to have a lively curiosity about many things, and chiefly he wanted to know what had happened to the Queen of Karmania and how much had been told her of the truth of their mutual adventure.

Throughout the first twelve hours he had slept like a log, and as for Jeff Robinson, the bubonic plague seemed to have struck him, and after one or two attempts with a wet towel and after shying his boots at the negro, his master left him to sleep his sleep out.

At the end of the second day in desperation Crossdale said to Korvan: "For a chap who is making a study of morgues, Korvan, Cye would be of prime interest. Frankly, I have used it up!"

From the front yard of the inn, where he sat with Korvan at a little table drinking the weakest attenuation of the fiery

reka, smoking countless delicious Karmanian *cigaretis*, he saw many things go by and some few events transpire. He saw a compact, businesslike-looking little army of soldiers ride away toward the west—toward, Crossdale fully believed, Jehanospelz. They departed to a chorus of royal and loyal huzzas. Prince John was going to have a lively time of it!

But he and Stanislas Korvan talked of nothing less than of politics—and on their three short days of acquaintance they talked on a great many subjects, from the opera in New York to the latest type of agricultural tool. He liked the young man thoroughly, and it amused Crossdale down to the ground to see how well he handled his job, playing the part of a courteous host, in as far as such a thing was possible in their primitive surroundings, and also of the astute and well trained diplomat.

"He would make a fine secret service man," Crossdale thought to himself, "and I dare say he is one."

Over the chimney piece in the tap-room of the little low-ceiled, black-raftered inn, hung a chromo, with a frame braided in the Karmanian colors. On the night of their arrival Crossdale stood in front of it and turned pale. To Korvan, who had bent down to light his cigarette with a coal, the American asked: "Is that the Queen?"

Korvan rose from his crouching position and answered briefly: "The Princess Mariska."

Could it be true? There she was, in a cheap, multicolored silk frame, hanging above the row of pewter mugs and a vociferous wooden clock! She looked out at him with her grave eyes.

"The Queen's sister!" he exclaimed softly, more to him-

self than to his companion, and stood transfixed, looking up at the cheap chromo. "By Jove!" he murmured, laughing a little.

Instantly to his mind came the remembrance of his old portfolio, with its collection of treasured letters and the little foreign photograph of an unknown girl. He could see it, with a smart photographer's name in gilt at the bottom. The little photograph seemed to have grown, to have matured, and there it hung, enlarged, different, and yet startlingly the same. The pewter mugs and the native clock disappeared as he stared, and his collection of pipes and the college man's souvenirs took the place of the things on the mantel-shelf.

"If it is true," he mused, "this chap here must never guess for a moment what it means to me. Perhaps it is only a resemblance—probably so."

Korvan watched him, and said with a slight smile: "You seem fascinated by the picture."

"Well," said the American, reluctantly removing his eyes, "you can't blame me. So that is the Princess Mariska!" And he added, "I don't believe the Queen's got anything on her for looks. Any photographs of the Queen about?"

"You won't find one in the Kingdom," said Korvan. "It's against the law to display a picture of Her Majesty. King Peter is frightfully jealous. There is a heavy fine and danger of imprisonment if the law is infringed."

Crossdale turned reluctantly away from his contemplation of the picture above the mantel shelf. Encouraged by this personal break in the dull day, he tried to continue the subject in question, but Korvan would not follow him; and

the officer's phlegm was a bit too much for Crossdale's impatience. "Gad," he said shortly, "if there is any legitimate subject your Government permits us to discuss, let's get on to it." He determined to wait the three days out and if Refan Ugo failed to put in an appearance, to demand an escort back to Tamaresk and to leave the Kingdom.

Another subject which appeared to be taboo was the work to be done on the royal state railway. Korvan appeared to ignore the reason for Crossdale's coming to Karmania. The atmosphere created by the young man's cut-and-dried choice of subjects for conversation made Crossdale violent in his dislike of autocracy. In desperation he thought to himself: "It wouldn't take much to make me cut away and join that old brigand, and if I had been born Karmanian I would be a revolutionist!"

He said to Stanislas Korvan, one night before the restaurant door, when the musicians started to play: "If Her Majesty is going to live up to her poetical promises, she's got a long order outstanding."

Nervous, restless, bored and at the end of his patience, he broke loose during the afternoon of the third day. "See here, old top," he said to his companion, "I have found out where the present overseer of the railway and his staff hang out. If you want to stay here and sample *reka*, do, but I am going to light out for the railroad yards and Baumgarten's tunnel. I want to see the Cye part of the operations."

They were coming out of the inn door together, and as they walked down the little path from the terrace of the restaurant to the high road, Crossdale heard a delicious

ringing, like the music of old-time sleigh-bells, and Korvan put his hand on Crossdale's arm.

"Look," he said, pointing toward the forest and speaking in a tone of greater frankness than before, "over there, about two hours' drive, is the Queen's hunting-box, Las Restaurus, the Rest House."

"Splendid!" exclaimed Crossdale. "Glad to know there is something within any distance. Now that you seem free to mention anything so definite as a house, I am glad to hear about it. So the Queen hunts, does she, and keeps a hunting-box, as well as writes verse and misleading songs? What does she hunt?"

Here Crossdale saw his luggage being carried out of the inn and Jeff Robinson, awake at last and dressed for travel, came out, following the inn servants. "It is growing late," said Stanislas Korvan. "Tonight we sleep at Las Restaurus. Are you ready?"

A low sledge on runners, the seats covered with green linen striped in white and scarlet, rugs of fur over the box of the seat—Crossdale saw the most original vehicle he had ever seen in his life waiting before the inn door. The sledge might have sprung from a pumpkin struck by a wand. It was an amazing little carriage. All the peasant horses and mules were hung with bells; but the tinkle and jangle of the bells on the four gray stallions harnessed to the sledge was a particularly musical sound. The first horse was mounted by a postilion, in myrtle green, with high boots and round fur cap. The little equipage was unmistakably royal and belonged to the court stables. But Crossdale did not move.

"Lieutenant Korvan," he said quietly, "I have a feeling

that you are a fine chap and quite all right, but I don't ride in any sledge in September into a wilderness, or follow any procession until you have doped out to me in plain English where I am going."

Korvan had become quite human. He seemed delighted to be starting away. "Oh," he exclaimed, "Mr. Crossdale, I understand perfectly, but I give you my word of honor everything is *en regle*. Things will be easier and more agreeable from now on. You are the guest of the Prime Minister. He is coming tomorrow expressly to meet you and in two hours we will be in the hunting lodge of Her Majesty."

"Good!" exclaimed the American. "It sounds ripping, but I am not accustomed to being a royal guest or to interviews with Prime Ministers. What the deuce does he want to meet me for with all this ceremony?" They were walking together down to the sledge.

"Why," returned Korvan, "all the hopes of Karmania are centered on you just now, Mr. Crossdale. The Royal State Railroad, you know, is in your hands." He smiled affably.

Crossdale felt that the ban over him was lifted and as they took their seats in the *treja* and his luggage was put in and Jefferson Robinson climbed sulkily onto the box next to the Caucasian driver, Korvan continued:

"Her Majesty has been in Paris, and has just returned to Karmania and for several days, with her sister, the Princess Mariska, she has been *en villiagature* at the lodge. That is why we have been obliged to hang out here. The formalities are strict in Karmania, but the royal party is on its way to the capital by the plains and Pratz Zenoe."

As they started, to the chorus of bells, Crossdale said: "I came very near meeting the Queen of Karmania not long ago."

Korvan lifted his eyebrows, but did not show any great surprise. "In Paris? I dare say."

"I couldn't really tell you the name of the place, but we missed each other by the merest chance."

They glided and slipped over the pine-covered roads, velvet-smooth under the sledge runners. Their route led immediately into the unspoiled, unharvested forests of the ancient mountain sides. Purple-trunked trees, pink cedars, rose on all sides, thick and close. The scent of spice and balm hung heavy on the air, and it grew rapidly very cold.

After a drive of more than two hours, without any warning the sledge ran suddenly into a wide clearing in the pines and the driver swung up before the lighted doorway of a low stucco country house, red-roofed, with bright curtains before the windows, through which the warm light shone. The house had a fine air of elegance and comfort and glowed with welcome to the stranger. The American felt for the first time that there was a possibility that the promises of the Queen's folk song might be fulfilled.

If the photograph he had seen over the inn chimney were one and the same with the little picture at home, anything might be possible. The bells had told their approach; lined up on the porch a row of men servants, in myrtle green liveries, with high soft boots and silver chains round their necks, waited stiffly for the *treja's* arrival.

As Crossdale followed Korvan across the red-tiled terrace to the lodge door, three Russian wolfhounds, thin, gray,

long-nosed and long-haired, sprang toward him in a splendid greeting.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Crossdale enthusiastically. "That's good—dogs! And friendly dogs!" He glanced approvingly at the servants, serious-faced, two of them with long gray beards. "Dogs and old servants," he thought, "that is a first rate beginning."

CHAPTER VIII

HE LEARNS THAT HE HAS FALLEN IN LOVE WITH A MERE
WOMAN, WITH NO HISTORY WORTH RECALLING

As he went in from the cold of the open, the luxury and the gay coloring of the living room dazzled his eyes. Across a six-foot red-brick chimney burned a fire of great logs, filling the room with resinous sweetness. Rugs of boar and bear skin covered the floor. The Queen's colors—white, myrtle-green and scarlet—dominated in the decorations. Glowing, harmonious, the room welcomed the traveler with an oriental exuberance.

There were three of the Russian wolfhounds—Bela, Tristan and Griffen, and the female Bela, crying and whining like a human thing, sprang on Crossdale, resting her forepaws on his chest to lick his face. She seemed as though she greeted her master in Crossdale. Korvan was apparently delighted with the dogs' welcome of the guest.

"I assure you I have never seen them like this with any one before, except their master," he cried.

Crossdale wound his hand in the collar of the female.

"Prince John bred and trained them and they have never forgotten him."

As the travelers gave up their furs to the footman, Korvan looked about the living room as though he loved it. "This," he said, "is Her Majesty's favorite place, but in point of

fact it is Prince John's creation. He is a famous wolf hunter and he built this lodge for himself. It seems only yesterday that he left it. What rooms have you prepared for his Excellency?" And as the steward replied, Korvan's face illumined. "Splendid! They have given you the Prince's own suite. No one has occupied them for a long time." He put his hand on Crossdale's arm. "I believe special good luck is coming to you, Crossdale. We have a proverb—'To those who are fated to climb high all steps are golden.'"

They followed the chief steward down a long corridor until a thick-set cedar door was pushed open into an apartment bright as a painted cedar box and full of comfortable, luxurious things. Crackling coals of pine shot yellow sparks from a freshly lighted fire, and across the deepset windows green curtains, with the Queen's arms in white and scarlet, were jealously drawn. Softly lit by candles in iron candlesticks, the room spoke delightfully to the traveler of the rebel prince's personality. Welcome, it seemed to say, welcome, Stephen Crossdale of San Francisco! A democrat welcomes you!

The luxury of the apartment seemed unfitting for a commonplace young man. His own bungalow had impressed him as lacking in simplicity, but this surpassed anything he had ever imagined. The furniture was heavy and inlaid, the bed piled with eiderdown covers in green silk; and in the adjoining room a steaming bath sunk into the floor, a Turkish robe and slippers, waited, ready and inviting.

When the servants had left him, he turned to express his appreciation to Korvan, but found himself alone, save for

his own servant. At the sight of Jeff, Crossdale laughed aloud. The negro seemed incongruous beyond words in the oriental richness of the surroundings. Master and man stared at each other, as though across a dream. But Jeff had been bottled up too long; he had scarcely exchanged a word with his master for days. Now, with one hand at the side of his mouth, he dropped his voice to a sepulchral tone:

"Doan like it, Boss. It's sure some fake house. I bet yo' it an't de reel t'ing."

"Nonsense! Don't ever say the word 'civilization' to me again!"

"And, Boss," whispered the negro, chuckling inimitably, as he opened the valises and began to lay out his master's clothes, "if you say de wode 'hoss' to me 'fo' ma laigs thaw out I'll bust. I nebber seen a hoss less'n a mule I could stay on for mo' 'n mile'n my life, anyhow! I ain't bin raised to hoss ridin', Boss, 'n to think I'se been nailed to a natural born Garden of Eden hoss fer days 'n nights gets *me*."

"That's enough, Robinson. And I want you to keep your mouth shut here, and your eyes open—understand?"

The man was as trustworthy as the sun itself. He would have laid his life down for Crossdale.

"Any tomfoolery on your part might cost us both—" Crossdale caught himself up. "I don't like to exaggerate," he said, "it isn't my way. Shut up—that's all."

In the hunting room an hour later, Korvan and Crossdale, opposite each other at the far ends of the six-foot table, tasted the bounty of the Queen. A whole deer or a boar was often served at this board at hunt dinners. The superb pewter service, a hundred years old, bright as silver, was

marked by the Queen's crest. They were served by six valets in myrtle green and snowy white muslin trousers, and russet boots with soles soft as silk.

Crossdale fed the dogs from his hand, and whenever he moved he was conscious of the soft, firm body of one of these silent friends. Griffen was the father, solemn as a wolf, a tragic dog, sad-faced, with questions in his eyes; eternally he seemed asking for the whereabouts of his beloved master. But Bela and Tristan were young dogs and full of the hopefulness of life and of faith in the new friend. As Crossdale glanced up at the trophies of the chase upon the wall, boar heads, stags' heads, one great gray wolf's head caught his attention.

"Yes," nodded his companion, "wolves—packs of them. We shoot them all the year round in these forests. I dare say his Excellency will arrange a wolf hunt for you before you cross the mountain to Savia."

Savory food, curiously spiced, wine like blood and amber in the pewter cups, warmed their veins, served to release Korvan's tongue. Tradition, instructions were forgotten and before the evening ended over the coffee and liqueurs, Crossdale found that he was listening to a real man.

"You talked with Prince John Sarvanarof on the boat, Crossdale, didn't you?" Korvan began confidentially. "I dare say that Refan Ugo filled you up with a lot of lies later, about the Prince?"

Crossdale shrugged. "Lies?" he repeated. "How the devil should I know? I am new to Karmania."

"Ugo hated the Prime Minister, and he was cordially hated in return by the Prince."

"That is quite natural—opposite parties."

"I don't know," said Korvan thoughtfully. "It would be a very hard thing to hate Prince John unless you had a personal reason." And he added, "Refan Ugo was the chap who betrayed him, so you understand the situation between those two, don't you?"

Crossdale laughed. Between the two men on the floor lay the wolfhounds in graceful and picturesque attitudes; Bela's head was across Crossdale's feet.

"Yes, I can understand very well," he said. "I fancy that each man of them is waiting to get the other one's pelt, but for my part I find your exile a thoroughly good sort."

"Ah!" murmured Korvan, with unmistakable warmth, and then caught himself up. "He is the greatest Karmanian since the days of Cæsar's General, and he would have succeeded in his revolution if it had not been for one weak joint in his armor."

"Too great ambition, I reckon," said Crossdale. "That's where they all collapse."

But Korvan looked at him steadily, and dropping his voice, although there was no one there but the dogs to hear, said: "Prince John loved the Queen."

Crossdale listened. The bell of romance was beginning to ring.

"Well, he is a very dramatic personality altogether, isn't he?" said the American.

Korvan continued: "King Peter trusted him as he trusted no one in the world. They are brothers, you know. It is Tristan and Isolde all over again. The Queen and her sister were daughters of a Karmanian brigand, and the King

fell in love with Karmen Mara when she was a child. He saw her dancing at one of the village festivities and he went mad about her. He sent both girls to England to be educated. Prince John went over to escort the Princesses back to court when Karmen Mara was sixteen. Of course he fell in love with her and did his best to persuade her to elope with him—and I dare say she would have done so”—Korvan spoke harshly and with scant respect—“she is capricious and impulsive but the Princess Mariska saved the situation.”

Crossdale mused, thinking of his picture. “Well, that must have been at least ten or twelve years ago.”

“Yes,” said Korvan. “And when she came back King Peter married her. He is twenty-five years older than the Queen.”

In order to change the subject, realizing perhaps he had said too much, Korvan added: “You will be able to compare the two Prime Ministers for yourself tomorrow.”

Crossdale rose indolently and stretching out his arms said: “Well, tonight I am going to compare that glorious bed of Prince John’s with the bag of pebbles at the Cye inn. I feel as though I should never wake up again if I once fell into a good sound sleep.”

Standing there, the dogs rising with him, stretching out, too, long and lazily, yawning with their great wolfish jaws, the American, as though it were a last thought, asked indifferently: “And who is the Princess Mariska in love with?”

Korvan, bending down to stroke Griffen, turned purple red. Crossdale, in order not to display too great interest in the Princess, had his eyes on the wolf’s head above the

chimney piece. He did not see his companion's changing color.

"The Princess Mariska is a very different story. She is not a Queen, not even royal—nothing but a mere woman."

Korvan started toward the door, followed by the dogs.

"A mere woman?" laughed Crossdale lightly. "Happy princess, with no history."

Prince John's bed was all it promised and Crossdale, under the light, warm covers, watched the dying fire, dosing before he fell into a profound sleep. So he would have slept till morning, but a sound at the open window, wide to the night, waked him suddenly; and he was out of bed, in the middle of the floor, to receive an agile figure which crept in the moonlight over the window-sill into the room.

Although roused from heavy sleep, Crossdale was thoroughly alive. The dog, who had been sleeping before the fire, rose leisurely with no sound of protest, and stood moving his great tail slowly to and fro, stretching out his paws as though midnight messengers were commonplace occurrences. But Crossdale did not share his point of view. He saw before him a native servant, so like the others that he could not have distinguished him. The man made a profound salutation and held out to Crossdale a letter.

Looking quietly into the fellow's eyes Crossdale said quickly, in English: "You have barked up the wrong tree, Ali Baba! You have brought your special delivery to the wrong house!"

Like a bob cat, whose habits Crossdale knew so well, he sprang at the man, seized him by the back of the neck and

around the waist, picked him up like a skein of wool, pitched him out of the window and heard him fall heavily on the ground without.

Then he locked the window securely and drew the curtains. On the floor, with Bela standing guard over it, was the note he had brought to Crossdale. For half a second the young man thought: "Perhaps it is from the Queen!" He had always a lurking hope that she might in some way or other have heard of the adventure. He looked down at the little slip of paper close to the paw of the wolfhound.

"Put it in the fire for me, Bela, or eat it! I am inclined to think it belongs to your former master."

But he picked the letter up, turned it over thoughtfully. It was a thick envelope, without any superscription whatsoever. Nevertheless, he opened it. It ran:

"My dear Mr. Crossdale:

"I forgive you for your rescue of the Queen, and I understand your gallantry, and like you none the less for it.

"You are a clever young man, and this will make you *persona grata* in the kingdom. In this way you will be able to approach Her Majesty. Lucky Crossdale! In this envelope you will find a letter to the Queen of Karmania, unaddressed for safety's sake. For the good of the country and for her own good I ask you to deliver this letter in person to the Queen, if you can do so.

"You are not a good reader of the times if you think that because a few of my men have been taken prisoner that the republican cause is lost.

"In Las Restaurus, where this will be brought to you, you will be occupying my rooms. You will see by this how

well I know everything that is happening to you, Mr. Stephen Crossdale. Think of me in Jehanospelz; I shall think of you. Build your tunnel well; remain true to your democratic principles. We are brothers; we have a common ideal, and when the railroad runs to Roda we will be with you to celebrate the occasion. When you open the tunnel from Cye to the capital, we will meet. Until then: *Viva las Raypublikos Jehanos!*"

Crossdale turned the letter over, looked at it, then went and laid it on the ashes of the fire, staring down at it, his face suffused with amusement, and as he turned to go back to bed he said confidentially to Bela: "Well, I don't see it, do you? And between you and me, I don't think that letter was worth a tuppenny stamp, much less a special messenger."

CHAPTER IX

IF HE SIGNS THE CONTRACT IT WILL NOT BE FOR THE FUTURE OF KARMANIA

He was awakened by the crashing and jangling of bells, the prolonged huzza with which he was growing so familiar, but which never failed to awaken a certain thrill. He wondered if Queen Karmen Mara were not arriving unexpectedly, then remembered that the Prime Minister was due to meet him here on this day. Bela, who had spent the night outstretched across the hearth-rug, sprang on the bed, ponderous as a lion. The young man, in order to escape her morning greetings, tumbled out on the other side. He rang for Jeff, and a native servant answered, conveyed the information that the negro could not be roused from his slumbers. This native had apparently been some time in Crossdale's room, waiting for the guest to stir, for his clothes were laid out and breakfast ready, waiting on a table before a freshly lighted fire. The man salaamed, but made no answer to Crossdale's question as to the arrivals, and Crossdale smoked peacefully in his chair before a steaming samovar, cream thick as a glove, strawberries in ice and wonderful little hot breads, covered with savory seeds. Griffen wandered in and gave him a stormy morning greeting, and Crossdale asked nothing better than the company of these honest friends.

The dogs loved these rooms, where the spirit of their master lingered. Was their sense of smell so abnormal and keen that the fact of Crossdale having been with Prince John three days ago was perceptible to these fine canine nostrils? How could he explain their devotion?

He had breakfasted and dressed when a message was brought him that the Prince would receive him in the living room.

"Not being in France," he thought, "I can't put on a dress suit in the gray dawn to meet an official, and not being in England I can't wear a silk hat and a frock coat. How does one dress to meet Prime Ministers and Kings?"

He compromised on a tweed suit and a dark red tie, hastily glanced in one of the mirrors, went along cheerily, followed by the three greyhounds, wondering why the dickens Korvan did not turn up to take him by the hand and instruct him what to call this Johnny. As he came into the living room he saw before a table spread for breakfast a group of men in uniform around the shining samovar, smoking.

They sprang up as Crossdale entered. The central figure, a bearded soldier, in a simple uniform with no decorations save the French Legion of Honor, rose slowly with great dignity and grace. This was Prince Karol Sarvanarof. Of certain avoirdupois, with small hands and small feet, keen eager face, blue eyes deeply set under bushy brows; nose so slavic as to suggest the Hebrew, thick gray hair and closely trimmed, a pointed gray beard; he had race, distinction. Two young men, in uniforms more gaudy than their chief's, the sons of the King, were the other members of the party, with Lieutenant Korvan.

Prince Karol came forward toward the American with extended hand. "How do you do, Mr. Crossdale? The Princes Paul and Sarvan Sarvanarof, the King's sons. Lieutenant Stanislas Korvan I think you know."

The American, unconscious of every hand but that of the Prime Minister, found his grasp honest and firm. He was conscious of being under keen scrutiny. The Prime Minister dismissed the Princes. "Go on, my children, with your breakfast. Mr. Crossdale has breakfasted and so have I. These boys are young; they have been up all night, and youth must be served."

The three young men resumed their seats and the Prime Minister, going over toward a writing table in the window, indicated to Crossdale to follow him; and back of them, at the breakfast table, with its green linen cloth, the royal princes and Korvan sat before their dishes piled with strawberries like a fairy feast; it was a dazzle and sparkle of pewter.

Crossdale sat down opposite to the Prime Minister at the writing table. Prince Karol glanced at the wolfhounds who had followed Crossdale and who stood one on either side of him.

"You give us guarantees of good faith and a sympathetic personality, Mr. Crossdale. The dogs have made friends with you already." The Prime Minister raised his brows, half questioning, half humorous.

"You know how to treat dogs in Karmania," said the American. "Other places in the Balkans they abuse them. I think that to treat animals and inferiors well is a mark of breeding and civilization."

Prince Karol was studying the American engineer as well as he might. The diplomat, politician and subtle Slav, had the advantage over the simpler American. Prince John's wolfhounds appeared to be guarding Crossdale as he sat before the Prime Minister, in a deep green leather chair. Prince Karol appeared to approve Crossdale's lean, wiry figure, his capable strong hands, slender and sun-browned, clean-shaven, expressive face, with its honest eyes under level brows, his boyish forehead, with thick dark hair brushed straightly back. He was agreeable; he was magnetic, and at once unpretentious and thoroughly well bred.

The Prince returned: "Then we are *not* civilized in Karmania—we treat our superiors with respect, our equals with understanding, and ignore the rest. For us inferiors and animals do not exist."

From the table behind them came the gay voices of the young Princes, laughing over their breakfast with Stanislas Korvan. One of the hounds left Crossdale's side and joined the breakfast group and Prince Sarvan, fondling him, fed him with pieces of buttered toast.

"Before we go any further," said the Prime Minister, "I want to apologize to you for the treatment your servant received in Tamaresk."

"Good!" thought Crossdale to himself. "He is beginning at the small end. I wonder what he will say when he comes to the royal story?"

"Karmania is somewhat barbaric still," said the Prime Minister. "People are passionate, impulsive, and I would like to make it clear to this body servant of yours that he must not make any attack upon the people. It would be

difficult to protect him, Mr. Crossdale—and, possibly, to protect you.”

Stephen leaned back in his chair, thrust his hands in his pockets. Nothing could have surprised him more than this curious opening of a conversation. He felt like retorting: “But why Tamaresk? Why the devil not Jehanospelz? Why, in short, any apology to a chap who has nearly lost his life while entering the country in perfectly good faith?”

Prince Karol called Stanislas Korvan over to him. “Ask them to send Mr. Crossdale’s servant in here. I like American negroes,” continued the Prince. “They make such faithful servants.”

“You know them?”

“I have been all over the United States,” said Karol Sarvanarof.

“Wonderful people!” thought Crossdale. “Here this chap sits and looks like Bluebeard, and I dare say he has sampled all of the delights of our big cities, like any commonplace middle aged man.”

“I’ll answer for my man,” he said quietly. “He is a first-rate fellow. He was a Pullman car porter originally, if you know what that means; and before he went on that job he was a prize fighter; he did a little work in the ring.”

Crossdale said this with satisfaction and a smile which did not quite declare itself. He was thinking of Jeff sleeping his honest sleep, which had overlapped his duties, but he was entirely unprepared for the apparition that came in with Korvan, which he never forgot as long as he lived.

Jefferson Robinson was in spotless white linen trousers, full to the knees; black broadcloth jacket, embroidered in

green; high black boots; a black silk scarf around his waist with one end falling to the knee, and a red tarbush. Shades of Pullman porters! Figures of capable American independent negroes! The old impression was forever lost in that which stood before Crossdale's startled eyes. He turned away to hide his amusement from the man, who looked mild and docile, sheepish. But he was frankly enamoured with his masquerade.

Karol Sarvanarof nodded to him. "Is this your prize fighter?" he said to Crossdale. And before Crossdale could answer: "We have put your man in what will be your house livery while you are in Karmania, Mr. Crossdale." And turning swiftly to the negro, the Prime Minister said: "You are a good chap. I've heard about you from Captain Ugo. It was very devoted of you to follow your master to Karmania, but you must be careful here, my good man. These people are very hot blooded. Don't be too quick to take offence."

Jefferson Robinson came out of his daze. Sarvanarof spoke perfect English—the English of Oxford and of civilized cosmopolitans. He was perfectly intelligible to the negro, who recognized the master and the gentleman in him. He made an expressive gesture that went by way of salute, and like all the people of his irrepressible race when given a chance to speak, spoke.

"'Scuse me, Boss," he said, "ah've traveled from Pittsburgh to New York so many times dat ah reckon if you added up de miles 'twould be a couple tours 'round de world. Ah ain' afraid of anybody, nowhere, an' when ah was a Pullman porter on de Limited, quite a few times ah

had articles stolen from my berths, an' one time, boss—" he dropped his voice.

Both of the young Princes and Stanislas Korvan had paused in their breakfast to listen to this monologue, delivered in the rich dialect of the unspoiled American black. The Prime Minister scarcely heard him. But he delighted his master.

"An' one time, boss, ah came into a stateroom an' foun' a crook goin' through de pockets of my passenger, who was asleep in his berth. Ah tell you ah never tol' anybody what ah did to dat man, but ah don' min' tellin' you. 'Twas at de en' of de train, de las' stateroom, an' ah picked him up by de seat of his pants, as ah came in behin' on him, an' boss, ah opened de door of the car and ah dropped him off de train."

Jeff stopped with his sepulchral confession, and controlled the darky gurgle of laughter that began to break out in his throat. Prince Karol vouchsafed neither encomium nor reproof. He said curtly: "I think your man would make an excellent executioner."

His master nodded. "All right, Jeff, that'll do." And Jeff wheeled and got out of the room with more or less alacrity.

"Now," said the Prime Minister, "these young people have finished their breakfast." They had done so and after profoundly saluting their chief, the three young men wandered out toward the back of the room and entered a sun parlor, built into a clearing of the pines.

The Prime Minister and Crossdale found themselves alone. On the table before which they sat lay maps and papers by the inkstand and the pens, and Crossdale observed

forms and contracts, prepared evidently for his signature.

"Mr. Crossdale," said the Prime Minister, "you are the inmate of a small but powerful kingdom. We are black with traditions in Karmania, and fixed as the rocks in our customs. Our little monarchy is unknown to your great republic. We have lately had a revolution and a civil war, and the traitors are still at work, subtly and in secret. Now I have said all that I intend to until you have answered my little inquisition. What happened to you from the time you left the Grand Hotel at Tamaresk until you were picked up by our servants on the plain?" Under the Prime Minister's steady gaze the young man's eyelids did not flicker.

"I wish I could tell you, your Excellency." He stopped, smiling.

"But you *will* tell us—give a full and detailed story, I hope?"

"Short and to the point, your Excellency. I think that the wine we drank at the last resting house must have been doped—drugged," he amended.

"Ah!" The Prime Minister watched him intently.

But Crossdale was determined to play the straight game as far as possible and not to report Jehanospelz until he was forced to do so.

"My man servant and I were dragged from the victoria, bound, gagged, and left as you found us."

The Prime Minister interrupted: "Bound by whom?"

"There may have been a hundred or so of them—soldiers, armed men. Of course when they first came up I thought it was the caravan of Captain Refan Ugo."

"I see!" exclaimed Prince Karol. "One of my cousin's bandit raids! You were caught in it. Your escape was a very lucky one! Not that he would have murdered you; he would have had no reason to do such a thing. Prince John and his followers make these sorties, these brigand attacks, throughout the country. They impress, they terrify; it is a sort of guerilla warfare. You understand," he nodded, "that those were the soldiers of Prince John Sarvanarof, the republican leader, the exile?"

"Indeed?" said Crossdale, with apparent interest.

"But," continued Prince Karol, "you will be glad to know that our pursuit has been eminently successful. The Queen's Guard and the First Regiment of Fusiliers have scoured the country since the attack upon you and Prince John has gone into Roumania, and we have taken prisoner over a hundred and fifty men."

"Ah," thought Crossdale, "little Captain Zito is behind the bars today, I'll bet a shilling! But not a word about the Queen's little midnight escapade. Well, if that's their game I shall have to play it!"

Now Karol rang the bell and gave orders that Captain Refan Ugo should be called. The officer who had chaperoned Crossdale's entrance into the country came in. He saluted the Prime Minister with a profound salaam, disgusting in its slavishness to Crossdale; he could not understand why a mere military salute would not have done as well. This latter the American received. But the Karmanian met neither the eyes of his chief nor those of Crossdale. Refan Ugo was in full dress tenue, a very brilliant uniform.

Before the Prime Minister spoke Crossdale felt the

moment was an important one—for the Karmanian, at least. "You have, Captain Ugo," said the Prime Minister, in a tone which Crossdale had never heard equalled for brutal severity, "bungled the entrance of this gentleman into the Kingdom in a remarkable manner. We designated you to receive him and to be his guide, supposing that a man of your experience and position would be equal to the task. I need not rehearse to you the details of Mr. Crossdale's journey. They are too well known to you. We owe him an apology." He bowed with suave graciousness to the American, who took such offence at his tone that he could hardly look at him. "But apology is not sufficient. I will say nothing further to you now, Ugo, regarding other matters relating to the day of Mr. Crossdale's arrival"—The Prime Minister stopped; the pause was ominous. He glared at Ugo, who would have been withered if a look could wither. Indeed, the big Karmanian seemed crumpled up and ready to dissolve.

Crossdale had never been more uncomfortable in his life. Could he speak for him? Would it not be *lese majeste*, or something or other of that kind?

But before he could speak the Prime Minister settled Ugo's hash for him. "Consider yourself relieved of your duties in the cabinet of the Prime Minister. You may rejoin your regiment. Try to retrieve something of the prestige you have so lost, Captain Ugo. You may go."

The officer turned perfectly livid. His consternation made it evident to the American that this was not a ruse on the part of Prince Karol in order to impress the stranger. Whatever the chief's reasons may have been, he was acting on

impulse. Crossdale understood that he had been reprimanded not only for the misadventure of the engineer, but for the danger to the Queen.

Ugo, white as the dead, saluted, clicking his heels together, touching his forehead with the back of his hand, bowed profoundly and went out of the room. Prince Karol turned to Crossdale and said quickly: "I could not give you any better proof of our sincerity and our good will toward you, Mr. Crossdale. We consider that you have been most badly treated since your entrance into the Kingdom. We extend to you all the apologies possible and I hope that from now on you will have no cause to complain of our hospitality."

Instead of replying directly to this, the young man said: "Captain Refan Ugo will hate me, all right."

"The likes and hates of inferiors, Mr. Crossdale, should be indifferent to us. Now," he continued, "here are your contracts. I think they appealed to you or you would not be here."

"Quite right, Prince Karol."

"The Western Transportation Company is to build us our road from the Savian side of the tunnel through the Karmanians to the Danube. You are to use native labor. You are to use the materials already in the country, which have been furnished us by the United States and England. Moreover, any new materials you may judge necessary, you are to import from whatever source you see fit, at our expense. Our guarantees are already in the hands of the Western Transportation Company in San Francisco, and we will meet our other financial obligations in the course of the construction of the road with your representatives."

"I have nothing to do with the financial transactions. My part is dynamite, electricity, steel and iron and men. What are your native laborers like?"

"They are the very best workmen possible," said the Prime Minister. "They are frugal, eager, childlike, industrious and gentle. Now, this is the proposition I am going to make to you: You are quite free to return from here, as Ugo told you. We will accompany you to Tamaresk and put you on the boat for Austria, if you like. This railroad scheme, Mr. Crossdale, was mine ten years ago. I am responsible for it. I am going to see it through, and if you return and leave us in the lurch, some French engineer or some Englishman will take your place. But if you accept and go on with the building of the road, you will not leave Karmania until your job is done."

Crossdale started, looking up at him attentively.

"During this time you will see no one. You will hold no communication with the outside world either by letter or telegram unless your communications are O. K.'d by me."

The American threw back his head and laughed out loud. "Why, what do you take me for?"

The face of his companion was unmoved. He lit a fresh cigarette, drank a cup of coffee at a single draught, sat back and waited. Stephen Crossdale was about to say: "I refuse categorically," and to tell his man to pack his luggage and to make ready to start back to Tamaresk. Then Fate played a trick of chance upon him; one of those pegs on which, curiously enough, its threads hang, was suddenly driven into the wall above his head by the Hammer of Destiny.

As Prince Karol pushed the papers aside he uncovered an illustrated magazine lying on the table; it had a woman's portrait on the cover—a regal, beautiful woman's head, with long pearl eardrops in the ears and a string of pearls around her neck. She was decidedly royal looking, and her eyes were grave, and yet half humorous. It was an older face than the face of the little photograph in the portfolio on the Californian ranch, *but it was the same*.

Prince Karol quickly covered it up by a document which he held in his hand and just at that moment, without the window, a group of the Queen's Foresters went singing by. From where he sat Crossdale could see them traverse the road, disappear in the forest. They were singing musically, in chorus and in perfect time:

“What shall be given
To him who comes riding
Over the mountains and through the forests
To our hill city?
Much gold and glory?”

This time the verse of the Queen's song had a very pronounced effect upon the young man in the deep green chair. The voice of a woman seemed to call to him across his life, and in this half barbaric melody there was a summons that he had never heard before. It seemed as though some one called him, as though an invitation were royally extended to him. He looked away from the Prime Minister, who waited for his answer. Karol Sarvanarof was impressive; his personality was distinctly impressive and affected Crossdale.

As he looked away, the welcoming room, the hospitality he was enjoying, surrounded him, appealed to him. His hand wandered over to the papers on the table; he touched the plans, which had fascinated and lured him in California. The reality of his work was before him. A land to open up, a mountain to tunnel, a road to build—and a promise—of the woman whose picture he had bought when he was a lad.

The Prime Minister went over to the samovar and poured himself another cup of black coffee and brought over another cup to Crossdale. "Drink this," he said. "This climate demands a certain amount of stimulant. We drink coffee all day long. Don't give your answer now; take a day in which to think it out. Tomorrow I am going to entertain you according to the traditions of the forest; I have organized a wolf hunt. You must like hunting—you are a Westerner; you know what big game is. This afternoon," he continued, "we will go over to the railroad and inspect the work of your colleagues, and meet those who still remain of Baumgarten's engineering staff."

CHAPTER X

PRINCE SARVAN DISPLAYS THE FERVOR OF THE BOYS OF '76

In Prince John's charming little sitting room, where Crossdale was sure the exile had connived and plotted against the monarchy, Stephen busied himself with his correspondence. The letters with the firm's stamp in the corner and the plain American postmarks looked reassuring and far removed from intrigue. In one letter to his partner Caleb Storm said:

"We have been told of very rich oil tracts in Karmania. Germany and Roumania are doing their best to get their hands on them. Now the Western Transportation Company isn't going to sit by and see a lot of dubs get rich when they could be doing the same thing.

"You are nearer to those oil wells than we are to Texas and you ought to look into them for us. We have been informed that they are in the possession of Karmanian peasants who know nothing about the riches of the country. But you know better than we do. Can you put us wise?"

Crossdale could have laughed out loud. How easy it sounded! Get in touch with oil wells in a place where you are being treated like a pickpocket, and would probably be shot in the back if you wandered out of the front yard!

"Little old Caleb doesn't guess what a nest I am in," he mused, "or I don't believe he would have been so keen on sending me off."

He was still busy with his correspondence when, in

answer to his "Come in," Prince Sarvan, the more sympathetic of the two brothers, pushed the door open into his cedar-lined study. "Good morning, Mr. Crossdale. May I have a few words with you?"

"Sure," said Crossdale cordially. "I was going into the living room to answer my letters. Sit down, won't you? What will you smoke?"

"First of all," said the Prince, "on the wolf hunt tomorrow you will go with the Prime Minister in his *treja*. And wear your warmest clothes; it will be cold coming back."

"I did not know it was the season for wolf hunting," said Crossdale. "I thought it was too early."

"We will be hunting the old wolf, the mother and her young. They will be beaten out for us by the beaters."

Prince Sarvan was broad shouldered, fine muscled, apparently an all-round sport. His shapely head was well set above his military collar and the face mobile and expressive. He had a merry mouth and kind eyes, and his hair grew in a widow's peak on his forehead. He wore it brushed up straight like the bristles of a stiff hairbrush. He was eager, with much charm of manner, and drew his chair close to Crossdale, dropping into it leaned toward him and began in a low voice:

"I shall only be able to sit with you a few moments."

"I don't want to be let in for secret interviews, Prince Sarvan. I shall avoid all political discussions whilst I am in Karmania."

But the young man had him. He laughed. "Too late! How about Jehanospelz and the Queen's escape and your gallant rescue? You don't mind my saying that you began

fairly well for a man who is going to keep out of things!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Crossdale with relief. "I am darned glad somebody knows something about anything here—it is a relief, as far as I am concerned."

Sarvan looked amused. "My word, you've got a ju-jitsu swing, Crossdale!" he nodded. "By gad, you broke the leg of the man you threw out of the window last night! Did you know it?"

Crossdale exclaimed: "Perfectly great! Secret messengers ought to be insured against accident! Don't send me any more of that kind! We shoot at sight out West."

The Prince was apparently undismayed by this announcement. "Poor Creta! He's as faithful as your negro, and I dare say you would not like to have his leg broken."

Crossdale laughed. "You would be more likely to be able to break it than his head, anyhow. Jeff would have broken a tree with his skull if any one had pitched him against it. But I think too much of him to send him into a man's room at night to play the part of postman." Crossdale took a cigarette out of the box on the table and lit it. "Since you have got my number, Prince Sarvan, what is the next?" And then he asked, with a naive interest, "Does the Queen—does Her Majesty know the truth about her escape?"

Prince Sarvan shook his head. "She thinks that Captain Zito's men were part of her own escort." He shrugged. "What do Queens know about anything in their kingdom?"

He seemed to ask this of Crossdale, who returned: "Search me! I know about as much of the customs of royalty, Prince Sarvan, as I do about hunting young wolves in September."

Sarvan leaned across the table toward Crossdale. "I have been mad to talk to you ever since you came. I know all about your meeting with Prince John on the steamer. I am a democrat, heart and soul, heart and soul!" Sarvan's vibrating voice revealed unmistakably that he had a great deal of both heart and soul.

"I would lay down my life for Prince John. There are many of us in Karmania; we are all knit together to the end." His fine dark eyes were fastened magnetically upon the American; he knit his brown fingers together convulsively. "You will sunder the very vitals of Karmania before you can break us asunder."

Without the door was the low whining of one of the wolf-hounds. Sarvan sprang up and opened the door and let in Griffen, who came in, caressing the Prince. Here was another favorite of theirs! What did it mean? They followed Crossdale, they followed Sarvan. They were evidently revolutionary dogs!

"See how I trust you!" Sarvan exclaimed. "I have put my life in your hands."

And Crossdale said brusquely: "I came from San Francisco to build your road, and I don't intend to get mixed up in revolutions, if I have to break the legs of forty midnight messengers. And when you communicate with your—" he hesitated and added, "your former Prime Minister, if you intend to communicate with him, just ask him to cut out all this theatrical stuff."

Griffen, looking from one to the other of the young men, gave a tremendous yawn, then lay down between them with his head on his paws.

"You will feel differently," said Prince Sarvan, "when you have been in Karmania some time. You will become carried away by the spirit of the moment. You have made a tremendous impression on Prince John; you will be one of us, I am convinced. It would be impossible for such a republican as you are not to take an interest in our deliverance. My brother Paul will be King when the old King dies, unless we are a republic before then. Have you observed my brother Paul, Mr. Crossdale?"

"Not especially."

"It would be a tragedy if he succeeds to the throne. He is a debauchee, a cruel despot, and in the case of his death the Queen will reign alone, according to Karmanian law."

Crossdale asked: "If Prince John succeeds in overthrowing the monarchy, who will be the head of the Government?"

And Sarvan answered simply: "Himself."

It was all unreal to the traveler—spectacular. He remembered one of Jefferson Robinson's Darky songs:

"Hush, little baby, don't you cry!
You'll be President by and by."

He looked into the sympathetic face of the young man. "You and your brother are sworn enemies, aren't you?"

"Naturally," shrugged Sarvan. "I live for liberty and equality."

"It is a wonder to me you have not been assassinated long ago."

With attractive gravity the Prince responded: "I owe my life to the Queen." He sprang to his feet, put his hand to his forehead. *Heljen!* he murmured, then said: "I am

leaving Karmania today. Her Majesty's power is limited. I am young, ambitious; I want to live for the new republic."

The two young men stood looking at each other. Sarvan put out his hand. "Good-bye, Crossdale. Remember my safety is in your keeping."

He opened the door and passed out quickly, the other following into the living room. But Crossdale did not ask himself if he should demand an escort back to Tamaresk. He did not want to go. It was weird, not without danger possibly. Things were more interesting than any that had come his way and he had a personal reason for wanting to go across the mountain. He went to the writing table, wrote a commonplace account of his arrival to Caleb Storm and finished his letter just before Korvan came in to ask for his letters that he might send them to Tamaresk by special messenger.

"Is this all?"

Crossdale laughed. "Honestly, Lieutenant Korvan," he said, "you don't think that this sort of thing is conducive to correspondence, do you?"

Lieutenant Korvan apologized deprecatingly. "Can I have a few words with you, Mr. Crossdale? I have been trying to find you all day."

"Now," thought Crossdale, "here is another duet—Lieutenant Korvan and myself. What is *he* going to spring on me?"

There was nothing of the Oriental about Korvan. He looked like a bank clerk. He was pale and freckled, with light eyes and reddish hair, closely cropped and bristling, an auburn aureole round his face. He had a frank, unassuming

manner, and Crossdale believed him to be perfectly honest and thoroughly sincere.

"I like you, Mr. Crossdale," he said, "awfully."

"Thanks," said the American briefly.

"And so does the Prime Minister, Prince Karol."

With a slight drawl, Crossdale answered: "I don't know whether to be glad or sorry about that, Lieutenant Korvan. The favor of Princes isn't always to be desired."

Korvan smiled discreetly. "I have been in Prince Karol's confidence for ten years," he said, "and today I asked him the first favor I have ever asked him."

"Now what's coming?" wondered the American.

"I took the civil engineering course at the Buda Pesth University. I want to help Karmania; I want to be connected with the progress of my country. I have asked his Excellency, as a reward for ten years' service, to attach me to your staff. I hope that you will use me in the building of the road. You will need an interpreter; you will need a right-hand man."

This was the first practical suggestion that had been made to Crossdale in Karmania, but before he could rejoice in it, it occurred to him: "Ah, here is another spy! They have put him in Refan Ugo's place! He will be able to keep a real tab on me!"

"I am very much obliged, Lieutenant Korvan," he said, without any great warmth. "I have not signed my contracts yet with the Prime Minister. I will talk it over with him later."

CHAPTER XI

HE ANSWERS THE CALL OF THE WILD

In a fur-lined motor coat, thick gloves and serviceable tweed cap, Crossdale smoked on the porch before sunrise the following day until his host should join him for the hunt. He could not forget the interview with Prince Sarvan; it haunted him. And the fact that this stranger in a moment so vital should take him into his confidence—it was unheard of, weird beyond words. He wondered at the circumstances which had brought him here, and what it was all going to do to him.

A superb *treja*, piled with rugs, waited before the door, the driver muffled to the ears, and two huntsmen keeping the nervy little stallions from lashing over their traces by pulling their manes, fondling them, feeding them with sugar. A bit further, enveloped in a rimy mist, a group of horsemen, each man with a shotgun over his shoulder, a leather belt, into which was stuck a hunting knife, were ranged in a severe row, their eyes fixed on the door through which the Prime Minister should appear. They wore his livery—wine-red tunic with orange frogs, black trousers, the inevitable high boots, now with spurs, soft black hats surrounded by a yellow cord, the arms of Sarvanarof embroidered in yellow on the felt.

Crossdale could not take his eyes from the horses. He did not know which to choose among the fifteen odd stal-

lions, bred to hunt in these regions—the little Arab, all nerve and muscle, with skin as soft as the palm of a woman's hand; the Russian, full of curve and grace; the compact little Cossack, from whose nostrils fire and flame seemed to spurt as his rider drew him back, kicking and biting and lashing out with his fine little hoofs, from the ardent companions. Crossdale had shot over Southern marshes, stalked caribou and moose in Canada, trapped bear in the Rockies. But this promised to be the most novel and exciting hunt of his life.

He heard Karol's voice, speaking in a tone whose arrogance was very different to the suave tones which his guest had hitherto heard him use. Coming quickly out of the door of the hunting lodge, followed by a cringing servant in hunting dress, a man who had evidently misconstrued some order, the Prime Minister hurled a last direction to the man, then lifted his hand and struck him violently, with a gesture so practised that it must have been frequent, on both cheeks. The fellow swallowed this insult, bowed and saluted and slunk away to join the group of hunters below with their horses.

The Prime Minister wore a belted tunic of sable with a sable cap, and over his shoulder was slung his field glass. He looked fresh as a rose, with his perfectly trimmed pointed gray beard, almost clean-shaven, so closely was it cut. He seemed sparkling and full of health and vigor and full of power.

"What magnificent timber!" exclaimed the Californian. The giant pines and cedars lifted their pinkish trunks through the mists.

"We cut hundreds of thousands of trees every year," said Karol, "and ship by the bullock carts over the steppes, the way you traveled, to Roumania, to Turkey. You can imagine how it will facilitate things when we have the railroad." He removed his cigarette to smile fully at his guest, with a slight lifting of his bushy eyebrows. "Have you ever hunted wolves?"

"Never."

"There will probably not be more than two hundred and fifty. The proper kills in the winter foot up into a thousand, but then we have a bigger force of people at our disposition. What do you think of my two nephews?" Prince Karol asked this question with an abruptness and sudden turning of his head that very nearly made his companion start, and before Crossdale could reply he continued:

"My people don't like to hunt with Prince Sarvan. He is so erratic—possibly I should say temperamental. On the last boar hunt he outraged all etiquette and alone, with a couple of dogs, his back against a tree, he killed ten boar, without calling in his fellow sportsmen. He took the pick of the hunt, put every one in a bad humor."

Crossdale laughed. "Rather sporting!"

The twenty hunters on their little horses had made a wide detour. Now they were in front of the *treja*, a smart regular little army riding two and two. Over narrow avenues of yellow, pine-strewn ground; over miles and miles of pine and cedar paths, they flew. Here and there the undergrowth was a thick tangle of brush, and here and there broke into open spaces where the brush was cleared. The perfume of the morning and the perfume of the forest was like

nectar to their nostrils. The trees thinned toward the forest's hem. The *treja* turned abruptly, swung into the open, stopped with a jerk as the driver brought the animals to their haunches with a cry. Now before them spread the magic world of the limitless inland desert, which Crossdale rejoined here many miles beyond the entrance he had made into the Karmanian forest at Cye.

"Look," said Prince Karol, in a hushed voice, "at our inland sea."

Before them spread an ocean of delicious pinkish mist, which lay all along, winged as though with little pinions, over the plain. As sunrise smote it, it blushed red in the morning. Black forest hemmed it round like a velvet border. Crossdale could have absorbed its beauty forever, watching the lifting of the mysterious veil from the corrugated frosty land.

Further along, a dark square, like a handkerchief, seemed dropped upon the earth. It was the meet itself, comprising the Queen's hunters, the hunters of the Prime Minister, the young Princes' men, horses, dogs—all waiting for the arrival of Prince Karol and the American engineer. As the *treja* drew up, the horn blew a silver prolonged note; from the throat of every hunter rang the cry of: "*Heljen! Heljen!*" finishing up with: "The Queen!"

As the sound hung upon the morning air the sun rose and the mist rose with it, and all the rippling sea of the steppes grew red as a rose. The Princes Paul and Sarvan came straggling out from the meet up to the sledge. They wore the Queen's colors, hunting coats of myrtle-green, with white boots and astrachan caps.

"Mr. Crossdale," called Prince Sarvan, "doesn't it make you think of big game hunting in the West of your country?"

"Rather not!" exclaimed Crossdale. "It is unique!"

"But hunting grizzlies in the Rockies is pretty good all-round sport, as well!" Sarvan came round to the side of the *treja* where Crossdale was, and although he said nothing as he wrung his hand, the American understood that the young man meant it to be a good-bye.

And Crossdale looked over at the other, the presumptive heir, Prince Paul. Paul, slenderer, more boyish-looking, seemed younger than Sarvan. He was lightly built, his face weaker and more arrogant. He sat his little Arab well and listened laughing to Prince Karol's tale of how he had beaten the *muji*k before leaving the lodge. Crossdale could not but remark the difference between brothers—the ardent, emancipated Sarvan, and the other, wedded to the rotting, thread-bare traditions of an old system. On either side were ranged a line of men, long hunting knives at their belts and short rifles. They wound the reins of the horses around their wrists.

Karol pointed with his sable-covered arm to the far, dim distance. "The wolves come either from over there," he said, "or the forest. We do not know, but we are ready." And he nodded understandingly to Crossdale.

One of the hunters in green, who had joined Sarvan, red-bearded, blue-eyed, with a wide, childlike mouth and a naive expression of humility and authority combined, rode up to the side of the *treja* and stood stiffly and saluted, and what

he said in the dialect of his country to the Prime Minister, Prince Karol repeated to the American.

"There has been a good harry; we have only to wait."

The master of the meet, the red-bearded Karmanian, turned and galloped back to his serried group, gesticulating to them, waving, bellowing at them as though they were cattle, in a resounding voice used to reaching into far distance and to mastering dogs and men.

Prince Karol accepted one of Crossdale's cigarettes. "Undisciplined," he said, "arrogant, Prince Sarvan needs some lessons. Life will teach them."

But the American hardly heard him. The hunter was wakening in him. Nothing could reach him now but the voice of the open. He was beginning to be keyed up and keen as he had not been in many a long day, if ever. His nerves grew on edge. Every bit of him responded to the bright sparkling notes of the horn. He saw the meet divide, spread, a group go off into the forests, another ride down on to the plain to the left of them, like a torn bit of a handkerchief thrown upon the steppes, and in front of them, like a hedge, ranged a line of Prince Karol's hunters in their wine-colored tunics, their black hats—trim, compact, the flanks of the horses turned to them, swished upon by the active tails of the stallions, now as nerved up and keen as the human beings, whinnying, crying, but forced to be still by the cruel bits that held them like a vise. But the dogs!

"No finer wolfhounds in Central Europe!" said Prince Karol.

Their trainers had them in leash. They seemed to be endless. Larger than the average hunting dog, with long

stiff, grayish hair and sharp sensitive noses and muscular jaws; some of them old and well seasoned, all mad with excitement, straining at their leashes, yapping, yelping, save here and there a new dog who peacefully, on his haunches, bit at his fleas, and close to the feet of one of the hunters a couple of hounds slept, with their noses on their paws; but the majority were alive and awake. There was the tenacious jaw of the bull dog, the agility of the terrier.

It seemed to Crossdale that they sat like this, talking of nothing, smoking, restless, on edge, for an hour or more. His ears were keen, but save the insistent appealing call of the bugles from the forest, and the answer from the steppes, and the cries of: "Tela! Tela!" and the dogs, nothing broke the vast, cruel silence of the steppes and forest, until suddenly there came from somewhere a sound like the rushing of the wind, a sound like the moaning of the wind, borne to them, then dropped; then taken up again and borne along, smiting their attention as nothing else could have done.

"Listen!" said Prince Karol. "The wolves!" A shiver of excitement ran through Crossdale from his spine down through his limbs, and the whole experience seemed to him like a draught to the dregs. Again and again, swelling, subsiding, came that sea-like rush of sound, unlike anything he had ever heard before in the way of a wild cry, and the dogs began to go mad. They pulled and strained at their leashes.

Karol and Crossdale stood up in the *treja* and leaned forward to scan the Steppe. "They are coming from the steppes, Crossdale! Watch the horizon!" And presently the American saw in the dim distance the Steppe coming to

life, part of it form into a cloud, a blue cloud, like a moving mantle drawing ever nearer, nearer. He could not take his magnetized gaze from it; he lost track of everything else but this. Hunters and foot men, Prince Karol and the guard, the dogs, everything else ceased to exist but that approaching mass. It seemed so strange that it should be cut like this out of the life of the forest, born and thrown down toward them for destruction.

At first it appeared to be solid, advancing in a compact mass. Then as it came nearer it broke, fell apart, came together again, and the cry became more distinct and audible. And then there came to them on the wind the unforgettable odor of the wolf, the violent odor of the gray-haired wild things—and Crossdale could not forget that smell for months; it struck his nostrils with its sharp unpleasant odor. Until now he had been dignified, a formal man standing civilly by the side of his royal host. And in a second now he became primitive, the hunter.

"Excuse me, Prince," he said, springing out of the *treja*. "I've got to go and meet them. Tell them to give me a mount, will you?"

He did not know how he did it, but in a couple of seconds more he had the body of a horse between his knees, a gun over his shoulder, and his stallion pressed the flanks of the next one in the front line; and he bent forward with a strained expression of anguish and of fascinated eagerness to watch the advance of the gray crowd. And louder and louder came what was now a hoarse yelping cry, a cry to strike terror to a man alone on the plain or in the forest; and the filthy smell of the wild, penetrating and eternal, and

never to be lost from the fur, be it ten years a rug on the floor of civilization—the scent of the wolves came like an accursed thing to his lips and his nostrils.

As the pack advanced he began to see their separate forms distinctly. As a moving mass it was full of savage beauty and grace. There was the slender, eager, anxious mother wolf with her young; there was the heavy headed, hot-fanged old wolf, his yellow jaws dripping with foam; and the crass, crude, awkward, ungainly wolf cub, the wolf puppy. Heads up and heads down, baying like lovesick dogs at the moon, they came and suddenly, as they fully perceived the humans, the pack stopped, so instantly that the wolf puppies rolled over on each other. They huddled, they waited, in full sight of the dogs and the men. Then the pack separated as though by some mysterious order, and one half made for the forest; gray old wolves with the paler young, the watchful woman wolf followed by her children—to be met by the hunters of the Queen. And the rest of the pack came on.

Crossdale heard a voice at his side say: "Fire when you see—" And he interrupted: "Oh, hell—the whites of their eyes!" And shot and shot, and saw his bullets meet their mark and the havoc began. There was no escape for these children of the steppes and the forests. One after another they leaped and fell, screamed and came on. As they fell, their comrades, driven to meet their death through starvation, fell on their bleeding bodies, and were shot as they plunged their fangs in the steaming flesh. They rolled and they rattled in their great wide-open throats. From the center of the pack one leaped like a deer over the heads of

the others, straight for the horses, and the men, and Crossdale shot him as he leaped, got him in the heart and he fell, whirling as he fell.

The American heard the voice of Prince Karol: "A ripping shot, Mr. Crossdale! He's your wolf!"

Then they unleashed the mad hounds, who fell on what was left of the living like another pack of liberated wolves, to the cry of: "*Tela! Tela! Heljen! Heljen!*"

Crazed with the scent of blood, the dogs rushed half mad into the carnage, leaping at the jaws and the throats and upon the flanks of the unattached wolves, and no further shot was fired. Crossdale watched the dogs fight the wolves, clinging like rats to the throats, thrown off and returning, knowing where to fasten and where to hold. It was agony to the American to sit and take no further part.

Then the foot hunters, with black leather aprons over their wine-colored tunics, unsheathed their long knives and as they advanced Stephen was conscious that the wolves—what was left of them—had advanced too, and that men on their knees with their knives, and bloody dogs were fighting hand to hand with the wolves.

He heard the voice which had spoken before at his side saying: "You have four to your credit, Crossdale. The cleaners will take them for you. It has been good sport, excellent sport."

And he saw Prince Karol mounted, serene, tranquil, one white gloved hand thrust through the belt of his short sable coat, the other holding his field glass to his eyes. Like a spectator at a bull fight, the Prime Minister gloated upon the carnage and the massacre of the wolves.

As Crossdale saw it—saw two of the men coming toward him with a great gray wolf between them, hung by the fangs on an iron bar, and the men, smiling, lifted toward his horse the wolf he had shot in the air—he felt suddenly ashamed to be part of this bloody scene. Already over them in the air hovered the great forms of the vultures. Already the veteran dogs, some of them suffering from wounds and some only honestly tired, were coming to heel. Crossdale dismounted. The great blue cloud which had come so rapidly across the plain was exterminated. He turned his eyes away from the mass, from what was left of it; the returning dogs, and the kneeling men finishing the wolves—beginning already their work that would last all day, of hiding and skinning and preparing the fur. Over the back of the saddle of each hunter hung a great gray wolf.

CHAPTER XII

HE COMES FACE TO FACE WITH THE INTRIGUES OF A PATRIOT

The smell of the Wild Thing pursued him to a log cabin midway between the meet and the Queen's lodge, where he faced the Prime Minister in front of a fire of cedar logs, before which they eagerly drew off their gloves and warmed their hands. It was growing bitter cold. On a rough table jugs of ale, green bottles of *reka*, bread and cheese tempted the hunters, and a woodsman in national peasant dress carried in a steaming plate of flapjacks, the only hot article of food beside the inevitable Turkish coffee.

Prince Karol and Crossdale, according to etiquette, preceded every one else to the cabin, to be followed shortly by the hunt. The sport had exhilarated Crossdale to the last degree, and he had had something of the feeling he used to experience at home in the old days after the proper number of cocktails, when he wouldn't let himself take another because he had a deal on—the keen point of enjoyment before the swing over! Now he was drunk with sport and air and the excitement of the kill, and his companion appeared to him to be a first rate chap, a glorious host.

The Prince, who had thrown off his furs, stood beaming, rubbing his attractive, supple hands. Like Refan Ugo, the Prince too wore a little finger ring of an uncut stone set in rough gold. In the case of the Prime Minister it was a

pigeons-blood ruby. His cheeks were as red as a boy's, his eyes fairly shot out sparks of fire and enjoyment. He was a splendidly preserved, ripping old boy for his age, Crossdale thought, tuned up to this high pitch of the joy of life, that physical well being that comes with exercise and the chase. Crossdale had not anything in the world against anybody. And least of all against the master of this bully little cedar cabin, with its odorous fire and its tempting lunch. Possibly Prince Karol thought that the American also, divested of his big coat, was a fair specimen of the vigorous healthy animal, for tonight he was at his best.

"You're a first rate sport," he nodded at the American. "I knew it the first time I saw you in the living room of the Queen's lodge. Each individual has all sorts of signs written over him, and any good student of human nature can read them. You see the good business man—most of your countrymen are that—or you see the temperamental enthusiast, or the stolid materialist, but whenever I see an all-round sport written on a man I like him."

"Thanks," said Crossdale. "It's the best compliment you could pay me. But shooting a few wild animals doesn't give you a diploma, you know, Prince Karol."

The face of the Karmanian expressed cordial liking for Crossdale. "You will get your diploma on the other side of Mount Nepta, when you open the Royal State Railroad for us." Karol went over to the table and took his seat and poured out with his own hands a mug of ale for Crossdale.

"There's no reason on God's earth why we should wait for a lot of hunters. The Princes are always late. Come, Mr. Crossdale." Karol lifted his own ale mug and said. "The

Queen." They had drunk other toasts to her at the Queen's lodge, before, but it seemed amusing to Crossdale to drink it alone with her Prime Minister, both standing, and the American repeated: "The Queen" with a great deal of grace and a sincere gratitude for all the fun she was giving him in her fine forests at the foot of Mount Nepta. He fell to with a hunter's appetite like a barbarian, finding everything wonderfully delicious. "If I lived here," he thought to himself, "I'd be like these people—half-barbarian, primitive, a wild man, hunting six days in the week and plotting against kingdoms on the seventh."

There was a sound of horns, of bells, of the coming hunters, and in another minute the door of the cabin was burst open without ceremony, and a man in the livery of the Queen, pale, dishevelled, with distraught face, half dragged in by Karol's and the Queen's servants, rushed at them, fell at Karol's feet and beating his forehead upon the ground, cried out things unintelligible to Crossdale, but things which he knew were of great import. Then followed a confused murmur of voices, of the servants talking together, with the man—on his feet now—as spokesman, pointing, weeping, beating his breast, and the Prime Minister erect, immobile, staring at him. But Crossdale was so absorbed in the picture of this bearer of evil tidings that he did not recall how Karol had looked when the news was brought.

Then the Prime Minister, seizing his napkin of red linen, waved it as if it were a bloody flag, crying out words that sounded savage to Crossdale. He fairly beat them from the room like dogs, evidently cursing them, pushing them

away and demanding insistently Captain Korvan. The servants, jostling each other, haggard, worn, weary, many of them covered with the blood of the kill, crying "*Heljen! Heljen!*" and other unintelligible words, rushed out as they had come, dragging the messenger with them, fearing that perhaps if he remained behind the Prime Minister would treat him badly.

Then Prince Karol, snatching up his coat and cap and gloves, cried out to Crossdale in a tense voice: "Prince Paul is killed, Mr. Crossdale. They have found him shot through the heart in the forest. Come, come—let us get out of this. Let us get on to the lodge at once. Come! Come!"

Then Crossdale realized that the Prince was deadly pale. As he hurried out of the cabin into the open, he seemed almost to stagger, and Stephen put out his arm instinctively, and Prince Karol grasped it. They had planned to remain several hours in the cabin, eating, drinking and resting, and to drive back under the full September moon, but the *treja*, with its four stallions, was there before the door. The driver and postilion had been eating, in their meagre, pitiful way, a piece of bread, a bite of anything, but Prince Karol fairly beat them into their seats. He seemed to be in a passion of excitement and shock, and once in the sledge, as it flew, he sat huddled in his furs, never speaking to Crossdale, but showering imprecations and curses to the horses and the driver and the postilion. And so they shot off from the log cabin, through the light of the rising moon, faint at first, and as they left the forest house, they saw in the doorway the wild-eyed peasant who had baked the pancakes for the Mighty Lord, standing dazed and terri-

fied, with a dishcloth over one arm and the pancake turner in the other. The *treja* suddenly drew up with a crash and Stanislas Korvan flung himself off a horse and climbed up onto the seat with the driver.

Suddenly Karol turned violently to the American. "And the Prince Sarvan has disappeared—no one knows where. If there is a Heaven above us he will be found! This is one of John Sarvanarof's diabolical plots, to wipe out the succession and to abduct the Queen. But Sarvan will be found—he will be found."

From the front seat where he sat, Korvan's breath was visible on the cold air. Without turning he said quietly: "The Prince Sarvan has not been seen since the two Princes went off together into the forest before the wolves were sighted."

The Prime Minister huddled in his coat. But Crossdale felt no more part of the moment than does a man on a street corner feel a part of the newspaper which he buys in order to read the extra. He was conscious that Karol was murmuring in his native tongue, and the American caught the word "fratricide."

Meanwhile they seemed to fly through the moonlit pines, with the moon's shadows, the moon's radiance, playing down on them like water, over the same path where they had all come so gaily in the dawn, and over which now they would drag that young body home.

"It's horrible," he said aloud, "Perfectly horrible! It must have been a stray shot from—" Karol's hard laugh broke in on him. "A hunting accident—that's a plausible solution, isn't it, Mr. Crossdale?"

"Had Prince Paul enemies?"

"In a time of revolution the heir to the throne has enemies, yes," said the Prime Minister. And he fairly screamed at the driver: "*Mi ja! Mi ja!*" And the mujik threw out his long whip over the four horses, crying to them, and they raced with the moonlight into the deepening night.

CHAPTER XIII

CROSSDALE PROVES HIS SPORTING BLOOD

"What in the name of Mike did you get into those togs for, Jeff?" Crossdale surveyed his man servant with irritation. It made him angry to think that Jeff Robinson should be part of the masquerade. "I want you to go to your room and get into your own clothes. I don't care what happens—you get out of those things."

The negro, who was laying out Crossdale's clothes, looked at his master with a broad grin. "Boss, dis ain' cibilization, but ah ain' yet seen de place where a feller can go out in his birfday suit an' not git run in by de police."

"What do you mean?"

"Um—um—de first night when we got here ah done fell asleep soon's ah hit my berth and ah dare say ah snored so yuh could have heard me from de tender to de observation car. An' believe me, Boss, ah never woke up till one ob dese damn fool natives was makin' signs ober me and when ah got out ob bed dere wasn't a thing but dese to put on, and dere ain' nebber bin since, not a ting."

"You mean to say they stole your clothes?"

"Um—um." Jeff's expression was inimitable, but less smiling and quite grave. "Mister Crossdale, ah sure did have to come to dis backwoods to fin' out how ah love ma life, and believe me, Boss, ah ain' goin' to lose it for a pair

ob pants." Jeff gave a glance at himself in the mirror and seemed to like the reflection. He certainly had the negro's true admiration of the picturesque. "Hones' to goodness, Boss, dey ain' so bad. What do you wear, Mister Crossdale, for goin' out?" The man was a refreshment to Stephen. Black as he was, he was the only bright spot in his environment and a great relief to his present mental state, and Jeff's expression "going out" sounded good to Crossdale.

Since the news had been brought to them in the cedar cabin Prince Karol had not let him out of his sight. Whether it was intentional or not, the American did not know. All night long, until the following morning, they had waited together in the living room for the arrival of the cortege bringing back Prince Paul's body, Karol's excitement continuing. He smoked countless cigarettes and drank countless cups of black coffee and *reka*. Over at a small table Lieutenant Korvan waited, quiet, grave, serviceable, watching his master's mood, transmitting what orders could be given, for there was neither telegraph nor telephone between the Queen's lodge and the outer world.

But Crossdale, keeping the Prince company, as he was forced to do, heard the sinister orders given to pursue Prince Sarvan all over the realm, to the Danube and beyond, by every possible means, by messengers and dogs, and he understood that bloodhounds would be placed on the Prince's trail. And he thought to himself: "Please God, they'll never get him, no matter whether he's guilty or not."

Of the dogs of whom he had grown so fond only one was to be found. When he finally went to his room, he saw

Griffen cringing under his bed. The dog dragged himself whining to his feet, licking them and fawning upon him.

He would have given anything in the world to have known nothing of Prince Sarvan's affairs, of his intended departure, of his politics. But it was evident that the Prime Minister was ignorant that he was anything more than an ordinary impersonal spectator of an internal tragedy, and talked to him like a broken-hearted father, telling him a thousand affectionate things of the young prince, making him appear a martyr and a young god. And finally into their watch came the notes of the bugles, bugles playing solemnly a silver dirge, which sounded weird and ghostly on the hunting horns.

Stephen Crossdale stood in the window of the living room whilst Prince Karol, barehead, went out on to the porch where the light of morning and moonlight met and blended. The hunters returned on foot and on horseback, and in the center of the group of servants, covered by hunting cloaks and furs, borne on a stretcher made of young pine trees, Prince Paul came back from the hunt, and they carried in the stretcher and put it down on a space which had been cleared for it on the living room floor. With the wailing and crying of the servitors in his ears and the exclamations of the Prince as he kneeled down beside the stretcher, Crossdale unobserved left the room.

"Dat old Bolshevist ain' nebber goin' to let us git out ob here, and ah ain' goin' any further dan de front door till ah gits ma ticket paid back home an' dey put me on de train." And he laughed back in his throat, his soft Southern gurgle.

"He's got *our* number all right, Mister Crossdale."

"Jeff, you're crazy!"

The negro drew near to him and dropped his voice. To his master his impressiveness was ludicrous, in his present costume of high boots, white trousers and embroidered jacket. "Why, Boss," he said, "dis mornin' ah thought ah'd go out an' take a little swim in de pond and ah hadn't got much funder dan de yard when ah saw de whole place guarded by soldiers all dress up fer war, an' a line ob blood-hounds. Why, ah tell yo', ah come back to dis house on ma tiptoes like ah ain' done since ah use' to git away from ma mammy when ah wus a kid."

"Why, they were hunters, and those were the dogs of the meet, you fool!" But the negro shook his head. "Hunters, nothing, Mister Crossdale! We're frozen in solid here, an' we'll be lucky if we ebber thaw out in de spring."

In spite of himself Crossdale was impressed. "You forget we're United States' citizens, Jeff."

And Jefferson Robinson grinned again. "Ah don' forget it," he said. "It sounds all right to me, an' ah keep sayin' it ober to myself like ah say ma prayers, but right here in dese backwoods, ah tell you, Mister Crossdale, ah don' git any comfort out ob either."

At this moment Prince Karol sent for the engineer. Crossdale gathered himself together and went in with Jefferson Robinson's words in his mind: "I ain' going to t'row my life away for a pair ob pants."

On his way he passed the open door of the room where they had laid the late heir to the throne in state, and he saw the tall candles around the long table on which Prince Paul

lay. Before the door of Prince Karol's private apartment, which the American had not yet seen, were four Karmanian soldiers in service uniform; they presented arms as Crossdale walked in. He found the Prime Minister lying down on a divan, with all manner of light refreshments and drinks around him and a cigarette between his fingers. He greeted the engineer formally, almost as if he had been a stranger.

"Sit down, Mr. Crossdale. I am afraid you have felt yourself sadly forgotten."

"Of no importance whatsoever, your Excellency," said the American.

"Everything that happens to a guest is of importance," said the Prime Minister, with dignity. "Korvan goes to Savia tomorrow to arrange for the funeral of Prince Paul. You will go in with him, Mr. Crossdale, starting at dawn. I cannot be your companion, as I had planned to be, when you entered the capital. I remain by the body of Prince Paul." Here the Prime Minister put his hand to his eyes. Before the American could speak, he continued: "You know that Prince Sarvan has disappeared?"

"Yes."

"We are scouring the country for him," said the Prime Minister, "and no effort will be spared to bring him back to look upon the body of his brother." He looked at Crossdale keenly and added: "I speak of going tomorrow with Lieutenant Korvan, but perhaps you would prefer to return to Tamaresk and let us take up the question of civil engineering when our country is a little more settled?"

Crossdale met Prince Karol squarely. Even should he

accept this proposition he felt certain that the Prime Minister would not let him go far under the present conditions.

He said quietly: "I'm on my job, your Excellency. Because your Prince has unfortunately been killed, it does not mean that an American civil engineer has anything to fear, either from the unrest of the country or from other reasons."

Prince Karol put out his hand. "Excellent! I thought you'd say that. I told you in the cedar cabin that you were a good sport, Mr. Crossdale."

CHAPTER XIV

CROSSDALE SEES A SCREEN PICTURE

The next morning Jeff woke him on the nick of four, with the science of a man accustomed to waking sleepers in their berths without disturbing the whole car. "Boss," in a voice as gentle as a woman's and as determined, "four o'clock, Mister Crossdale, suh."

Crossdale stretched and yawned. "I could sleep for ten years!" He made his toilet and drank his coffee by candle light, for it was dark in this heart of the forest. His suitcases were packed and ready to go into the interior with him, not out. He was penetrating further and further into his Adventure. Jeff Robinson's appearance this morning appeared to him too comical to be funny. In his tarbush and livery he waited to further cover himself with a wolf-skin motor-coat.

"Jeff, I want you to go and get your own outfit—understand?" The negro almost paled.

"When we start away from here at six I want to see you in your own clothes." Crossdale had no intention of playing father to the darky's love of costume. He did not want a Karmanian slave; he wanted his own man servant in American clothes, and he wanted him quick and he was going to have him. He knocked the ashes off his cigarette into the saucer of the cup, and after Jeff had left him gave

thanks, as he had done many times during the war, that he was alone in the world when he took chances like these. He could not think of any other advantages of being without relations.

It was growing lighter every second. He got up and went over to the window and looked out toward the approach of the lodge, and he saw, coming noiselessly over the deep carpet of the pine needles, four horses galloping, horses with their outriders; he watched them draw up to the lodge and the postilions fling themselves off and stand stiffly. The morning was still too dark for him to see distinctly, but a *treja* was before the door and a woman alone in it, wrapped up to the chin in furs. Before he could fully appreciate how strange it was to see a woman here she had left the sledge and flashed to the porch, the servants gathering about her. There was no voice, no sound, merely a swift entrance and an unbroken silence, cut into soon after by the whinnying of the stallions. Crossdale stepped back from the window quickly, guilty as a boy who has had a peep into a show for which he had not paid his ticket. It had all been as quick as a screen picture, and as silent. He had a dim impression that she was tall, veiled, and he felt certain that she must be the Queen.

It was of course possible that Prince Paul had a wife and that she had been sent for. It might be any woman in the Kingdom of Karmania—no doubt there were other women; but he never thought of any of them, only of the Queen and her sister. He had no time, however, to wonder further, for Jeff was back with two of the house servants, his valises were carried out and he followed them.

The night before Prince Karol had bidden him *bon voyage*, telling him that he would see him in Savia, and there was nothing for the American to do now but to go as expeditiously as possible, without making any further demands on the royal hospitality. All the servants of the lady who had just arrived had disappeared; the *treja* had gone.

Stanislas waited by their *treja*, ready for departure. As Crossdale got in, and they drove off together to the jangling and tinkling and clashing and smashing of the bells, he looked back at the royal lodge, before it was curtained off by the cedars and the pines. It had a new significance to him now. It had been full of charm when he came to it; now it was full of tragedy, with the dead Prince lying there in the light of the tall candles, and full of fascination as well, because of the silent arrival of the woman whom he believed to be the Queen.

CHAPTER XV

—AND SEES THE CAPITAL FROM THE HEIGHTS

Captain Stanislas Korvan was the most serviceable piece of goods he had seen unrolled before him since he came to these parts! There was no apparent mystery about Korvan. Practical, active, up-to-date, modern, and as far as Crossdale could judge, honest, he was an agreeable man of the world. By the time they had climbed together the western face of Mount Nepta Crossdale felt that Stanislas Korvan was "all right," and it was a comfortable feeling; like finding one satisfactory solid armchair in a room full of good looking objects in which you did not place any too much confidence. Stanislas was a comfortable sort of man to have round and he was alive on the topics in which the American was interested.

They had begun the ascent of the mountain in the bullock carts of which Caleb Storm had spoken to Stephen in San Francisco; mounting at a snail's pace in the wooden sleds of the country behind four snow-white oxen, ever upward into fresher, cooler, more rarified air, until the paths grew too narrow for the sleds, and mules had met them, carrying them ever higher, Korvan ahead, Crossdale following, and Jefferson Robinson, at home for the first time on mule-back and in his own clothes.

Toward the last ascent, when they had rounded their

abyss and looked back to see the interminable blackness of the forests lying far, far behind them, and before them the sheer rock and the encroaching snow, when they had seen the pin-speck in the dim distance that was Cyé, something that looked like a far-off sea that was the steppes; when they had seen these from a height of six thousand feet, their mules turned tail and went back with their drivers. And with Korvan and a couple of mountaineers, Stephen and Jeff bringing up the rear, they finished the ascent on foot to the hut on the most accessible peak of Mount Nepta.

Stanislas Korvan had given the choice to Crossdale when they left the bullocks, either to go over by an easy pass on mule back, the path over which the funeral cortege of Prince Paul would go into Savia, or to make the ascension, and the American had chosen, as he expressed it to Korvan, "to go the whole hog." They had begun to climb at six a. m. and by four, before sundown, they had reached the mountain hut where they were to pass the night on the summit of Mount Nepta. When Korvan had finished his frugal supper, when they had lit their pipes, the old mountaineer who had served them withdrew to the fireplace to bank up the logs. The snow without was up to the very doors. The climb had enthused and invigorated Crossdale.

"What a life the open offers, Korvan! I've got a little old ranch not far from San Francisco—I won't bore you telling about it, but you must come out and see it one of these days." With his elbows on the table and his beer mug between his hands, Crossdale felt kindly and warmly to every one. They had eaten goat's milk cheese and drunk the country's

hard ale. He felt the blood bite in his cheeks and run hot in his veins; he was tingling with life. The grand exercise put him at his best. "By George, Korvan, when the tunnel goes through, only mad mountain climbers will do this stunt! Gad, that's what happens in civilization—so many good things go."

Korvan shrugged. "That won't bother me. I am all for progress. I was born in Karmania, but I have been all about, and now the dream of my life is—" he paused a moment—"America."

He said this with much sincerity. He, too, was stimulated by the wonderful journey. The two men were growing closer together all the time. Crossdale wanted thoroughly to believe in this man; he would have to have some one colleague in this far-away place. "Come along," he said cheerily. "I will show you all over California."

"Ranching," said Korvan, "isn't a bit what I want though, Crossdale. I would like to go on in your profession, civil engineering. Do you think there would be any kind of opening for a chap like me?" Korvan was so serious that Crossdale was surprised.

"But," he said, "you have got a good berth in the cabinet of the Prime Minister. What more do you want?"

"Oh, it's a good berth all right," said Korvan, "excellent!" He looked down at the bowl of his pipe. "You saw how quickly I got my promotion to first secretary, didn't you, Crossdale? His Excellency moved one pawn."

Crossdale nodded. "The favor of princes—eh?"

"I am a modern man; I belong to the twentieth century," said the other. "If the twentieth century doesn't do a little

reaping here in Karmania, why, I think I'll emigrate."

Abruptly Crossdale asked him a question. He could not help it; it suddenly came to him. "Did you ever have much to do with the former Prime Minister?"

The young man blushed. "My relations have always been with Prince Karol." Perfunctorily he changed the subject.

But Crossdale was embarked on dangerous subjects. He was losing a little bit his balance up here in the heights. "Look here, Korvan—the Queen came to the royal lodge, didn't she, about twenty minutes before we got away?" At the other's open-mouthed astonishment, the American continued: "Oh, you needn't trouble to lie about it—I saw her arrive. It was a silent, unobtrusive entrance for the ruler of a Kingdom. Now, come on, Korvan," Stephen asked eagerly, with boyish curiosity, "it was the Queen, wasn't it?"

"Yes," said Korvan. "She came, of course, because of the assassination of the Prince. She must have flown from Pratz-Zenoe. And when his Excellency told her she just sat down by the table where we were all gathered, put her face in her hands and cried like a little girl."

"Poor dear," said Crossdale, gently. And all of a sudden the Queen of Karmania became a woman in his thought, not just a picture book thing with a ruined old capital around her and an uncertain sceptre in her hand. "Poor—" and he did not quite know what noun to use, and said, "Poor girl!"

"They were playmates, the Princes and herself, brought up together," said the First Secretary, "and although she never cared very much for Paul, they were friends."

Crossdale, as the Karmanian spoke, seemed to see her sitting there in the beautiful fur coat, crying into her hands

—into her gloves, perhaps, if she had not taken them off, just like a mere woman would. "They won't do a thing to Prince Sarvan, will they, if they get him, Korvan?"

But the other did not answer as quickly as Crossdale expected. "Prince Sarvan has a lucky star," he said slowly, "and the Queen is very fond of him. It would be hard to conceive of Sarvan and death together, Crossdale."

But Korvan retired into a shell of reserve; he looked so thoughtfully and so penetratingly at his companion over the red table, with the beer mugs and the remains of their little supper, that Crossdale thought to himself: "Now this damned old spy work is beginning on me, and I'm blamed if I open my mouth about any of their affairs at the point of a pistol!" He looked over toward the fire, where Jeff on a stool was propped up against the wall, his arms folded, his eyes shut, dropping into dreamland.

The American rose. "I guess I'll turn into that hole in the wall, Korvan, and get some sleep."

"Good," said the First Secretary. "And I'll turn into the other hole in the wall."

Before he rolled himself up in his blanket, Crossdale waked up Jefferson Robinson and told him to take the third bunk, and he thought to himself before he dozed off: "I thought I was up here with two friends, but I'm only sure that the black man is white."

Just before sundown on the following day they had nearly finished their descent, and Crossdale at last looked over the plains on the other side of the mountain to Savia. The view was superb. All the sides of the range were wooded densely

to the rocks, softening, paling at the base into a verdant colorful valley, warm and soft and beautiful in the September hues of blue and rich warm green. He could see the stacked corn fields; he could see little groups of white stucco houses with dark roofs; a church dome here and there.

Stanislas, clinging to his arm, pointed: "Do you see that pencil line? That's the run of the road, that's the railroad, Crossdale—our road—your road." Alongside it Crossdale could distinguish workmen's shanties and the outlines of his buildings.

But all the fertile valley, tiny villages, the glassy flash of a wide stream and the milky rushing and churning of a mountain river—even the line of the road which had brought him from California to Karmania—all was nothing but a foreground to the hill city on which he felt his eyes could rest forever. Abruptly out of this rich and fertile plain rose one of those curious earthy phenomena that mark the mountainous regions of Central Europe: a little mountain, an overgrown hill, like a sugar loaf, high and pointed. And tumbling down it, falling all over it, little old brown houses the color of the earth itself, the houses of the mediæval city of Savia. And out of the soft brown mass, as though it bloomed, rose the turrets and the towers and the walls of the castle, a fairy castle with flags flying at half mast. One by one, as though they were stars, the lights began to bloom and blossom in those far-off windows; to bloom and blossom and shine and glow, until at nightfall it was like looking upon a blazing jewel, a glowing, glowing gem, when the hill town was lit, window after window with its home light, and the castle like a shining star. "That is Savia," Crossdale

heard the voice of Stanislas at his side say. And Crossdale cleared his throat and answered: "Yes. I'm glad I've seen it—it is worth the journey." He knew why the flags were flying at half mast—because the heir to the throne had been—murdered or killed, and the Queen was absent.

CHAPTER XVI

CROSSDALE IS IN HIS BROWN TOWER

Crossdale was not King in one of the castles which had attracted him from the Danube boat, but he had a neat little dungeon of his own, a neat little turret; and he thought that he ought to have gone into it in irons in order to have been properly in the picture. Here he was, rising up out of the Karmanian plains, within a mile and a half of the city walls. He looked out from a round brown tower, whose stones had been put together nine hundred years before.

"Korvan," he had said to his guide, when Lieutenant Korvan had handed over the keys of the brown tower, "I want to tell you that if this was the dug-out they gave Baumgarten, you need not try to wish it on to me, for I'm not going inside."

But it appeared that Mr. Baumgarten and the rest of his staff had put up at a hotel within the city walls, and the charming old ruin which was allotted to Crossdale for his occupation during his stay in Karmania was an especial possession of the Prime Minister. Prince Karol used it for a studio, and for some extraordinary reason he had handed it over to the American engineer.

When Crossdale had been in it a week he found it fascinating from all points of view. He went round in it—he could not do anything else in a round tower—like a dog settling down in a new home. North, east, south and west.

he could view the country, and see the jewel-like city of Savia rising on its sky-touching hill.

There were only three comfortable rooms in the tower, his study, a bedroom, and Jeff Robinson's kitchen, incongruously opening from Crossdale's sanctum. On a table covered with a rich green cloth, Crossdale had set out his traps. Prince Karol had given him ten days in which to consider his decision regarding the undertaking of the contracts. He had an appointment with the Prince for the next day.

Prince Paul had been laid away in the mausoleum of his ancestors. Crossdale had watched the funeral cortege pass his windows. The procession was a picturesque one and more than usually effective as he learned it was not Karmanian custom to go into mourning for death—and, indeed, the colors worn by the mourners were more brilliant than usual. He discovered that in Karmania a person dead was, if not forgotten, certainly not kept in the public eye, and events went on as usual. He looked long at the dignified and impressive group of people. Amongst those walking humbly behind the bier was Prince Karol, in full-dress uniform, holding a cross against his breast. There were many women in the procession on foot and as they were all veiled, their faces and heads completely hidden, he only supposed that he saw the Queen of Karmania and her sister among the others, but there was nothing to indicate rank or royal state.

From another window he could look out on the one-track road of the railway, the rails rusty, weeds and grass growing between the few ties. It went as far as the open mouth of the tunnel and stopped short. This was the only evidence

that the Kingdom of Karmania was on its way toward progress by the means of steam and steel.

In spite of the strangeness and the fact that he was not yet acclimated, Crossdale was thoroughly enjoying the work, and in his part of the house Jeff Robinson was nearer being a king than he ever would be again in his life. He had constituted himself man-of-all-work for Crossdale and under him he had two native servants. Crossdale had refused to allow him to annex more than these. Robinson had a negro's love for pomp and power and it was "nuts" to him to assert authority. He lorded it and kinged it over the mild, humble Karmanians, who had been brought up in hardship, with blows more common than daily bread. Crossdale had an eye on his companion, and was watching him with anxiety as Jeff Robinson rapidly lost his head.

Since his arrival ten days before no post had come for him. He had determined that come what would, he was going to have his letters, if he had to go up to the castle and demand them from the Queen!

Outside the round tower the September day was as clear as glass, as fresh as fresh water, and Crossdale could hear in the kitchen beyond the rich tones of Jeff Robinson's voice. One reason that he had abducted Jeff Robinson was because of the man's true, musical gift. Now Jeff was singing, just so loudly that he could hear it agreeably:

"When you come to the end of a perfect day."

Crossdale heard the verse through. Jeff was preparing lunch. Every now and then he gave the Karmanians their heads in regard to cooking, but a great deal of the time he did it all himself.

Crossdale thought to himself: "Oh, a perfect day's all right, but in order to make it so a man should not spend it alone."

"When you come to the end of a perfect day."

Crossdale caught up a book and heaved it against the kitchen door. In a second it opened and Jeff Robinson stuck in his head. Jeff's passion for costuming was at its height in Karmania. He had constructed himself a white cap, which gave him the air of a first-class colored chef.

"Yo' call, boss?"

"Shut that everlasting noise."

"Yes, suh, Mister Crossdale. I just tossin' up—"

"Well, toss up and shut up!" Jeff got out and very softly closed the door on his master's black humor.

A judge of human character and of men's natures could not have looked at Crossdale and heard him talk without understanding what a fund of feeling and capacity for loving lay within his deep nature. His mother had been an Irish woman, and he had her wit and her imaginative sentiment. His father had been pure New England, back as far as New England can trace its history, and he had his father's poise and common sense and level-headedness.

"Karmania is made up of Prime Ministers and half-breeds and spies! Darn these monarchies! In any good old republic a woman or two would walk around underneath these windows."

He had seen already some of the native women, in little bright groups, washing linen in the flowing stream; seen their fine brown arms plunged in the water; and he had seen groups of villagers dancing the national *whirra* to the

music of the weird, characteristic instruments. The broad-breasted, lithe women, with their magnetic eyes and smooth brows, looked as though no care had ever come their way, as though they only cared to sing and dance and whirl under the light of the September stars. The most attractive and characteristic of all the figures was the mad close of the dance, when the woman, after dancing alone, flings herself with a cry on the breast of the man she chooses.

His job interested him, and as well it interested him most tremendously to know that in the course of events he was going to see in flesh and blood the woman whose picture he had in his portfolio in San Francisco. He had been waiting for a propitious moment in which he could speak to Stanislas Korvan and ask him further details about the royal family.

Stanislas Korvan had taken him to one of those evening dances on the edge of a vineyard, and he had told him that the Karmanian women were the most beautiful in Central Europe. He could believe it, and he did not believe that the Queen up there in her inaccessible castle had anything on these humble sisters of hers in the vineyards and the corn fields, and bending over their linen in the stream.

"She must be stupid," he thought to himself, "to be a Queen, anyway, in these times, and if she isn't she ought to change the customs that permit a Prime Minister to slap his servants in the face."

He was ready to find fault with anything, from within in the kitchen to the Queen in her palace. He called in one of the native servants, who because he spoke some English had been designated for his service. "Serga, I want my

letters from the United States, and I'd like you to go to Lieutenant Korvan and tell him so. You tell him for me that if I don't get my post by tomorrow, I'm going to walk out of the kingdom. Tell him that," he said, and the man bowed as low as Crossdale would permit him, for the American had made his servants cut their salutations short by a foot. He wondered grimly afterwards how much the man had understood.

He took his cap and stick, filled his pockets with cigarettes and left his round tower room by another door. At the door he met the Karmanian servant, who was starting off obediently with the message, and the man said: "His Excellency will not go out of the prescribed limits?" The only response that Crossdale vouchsafed was: "Hell!"

CHAPTER XVII

—AND THE QUEEN WAS IN HER PARLOR

The Queen was in her parlor, not eating bread and honey, but preparing to give attention to public affairs. As she faced her Prime Minister, she had neither sceptre nor crown to indicate her royal estate, only a tennis racquet in her hand. Prince Karol, who had not seen her since her return from Paris and his return from the interior of the country, laid down on the table between them a pile of serious looking documents. "These are for your signature, Your Majesty."

He saw at once that the Queen was in a state of great excitement, under the sway of strong feeling. "Your Excellency, I have sent for you to ask you immediately to issue a proclamation giving the Prince Sarvan free entry into the Kingdom."

She tapped the table lightly with the handle of the tennis racquet as Prince Karol ventured: "A Queen must not permit personal emotions to influence her duty."

"Stop! I command you!" He bowed, and when she spoke again she was trying to command her anger.

"Sarvan is as innocent of the death of his brother as you are—as I am—" she looked at him steadily "—as, for example, this strange American who has just arrived, I

understand. But to attribute fratricide to Sarvan is a crime." She met her Prime Minister's eyes fully.

"A trial alone will clear him of guilt," said Prince Karol. "And at all events, he is a dangerous rebel."

Queen Karmen Mara clapped her hands together and to the servant who answered this Karmanian form of summons she said: "Ask Captain Refan Ugo to come here at once."

Ugo, who had been waiting in the antechamber, came in immediately, pale as ashes, slavish, making first a profound salutation to his Sovereign and then to the Prime Minister.

"What news have you of the Prince Sarvan?"

"Your Majesty, that he is still in the kingdom."

"If you pursue him, you will do so against my express command. We will issue a proclamation today giving him the freedom of his country. Why do you look at his Excellency—why don't you look at me, Refan Ugo?"

"Your Majesty," murmured the spy, "the orders are uncompromising regarding the pursuit of the Prince."

Queen Karmen Mara sprang from her chair. She walked up and down the room, then came back, stood before her uncle, who had not moved.

"Your Majesty," he said, "I beg for all our sakes that you will control your excitement. Parliament meets at four. Whatever orders the Kingdom judges best to give will be given from Parliament. Refan Ugo, the Queen will be glad if you will retire."

On either side of the Queen stood two great boar hounds. She was very pale, and her black hair, clear eyebrows and

dark lashes accentuated the pallor of the fresh young face. She wound a hand in the collar of each dog.

"I see I am a prisoner in my own Kingdom. You are too autocratic, your Excellency."

The Prime Minister lifted his head and looked her very sternly in the eyes. Captain Refan Ugo had withdrawn. In a well modulated voice the Prime Minister said: "Your Majesty, you would wish then to see Karmania follow in the footsteps of Russia?"

"Rather not!"

"We are within eight miles of the Russian border—"

"I know."

"We believe that Prince John Sarvanarof is feeding his rebel troops from the Soviets. We have been unable to prevent an infiltration of Bolshevism, even with our excellent spy system. Let me implore you—have you any confidence in your Prime Minister and in your Parliament?"

"You know that I have."

"Red peril will run riot in Karmania when John Sarvanarof is triumphant."

The Queen did not speak for a moment. She tapped the back of one of her hands against her beautiful eyes. He had impressed her. The color came back to her cheeks.

"I am fond of Sarvan, you know!"

Prince Karol bowed. "I appreciate the fact. But personal affections and personal sympathies cannot, must not, sway you now, Karmen Mara. He is a wild spirit, a revolutionary fanatic. He merits neither your forgiveness nor your mercy." He saw her lip tremble. "We were great friends," she murmured, "we were playmates."

"Come," said the Prime Minister, rising and going over and taking her hand, which he lifted to his lips. "Be reasonable. You will be present at the session of Parliament this afternoon, and we will discuss the ways and means to protect our Kingdom. Come, let's talk of something else."

She drew a long breath and shook her head; then became, according to one of her many sudden transitions, a girl again, bewitching, charming. She seated herself on the edge of the table, with the tennis racquet across her knees, and she might have been any healthy young woman in from a game of tennis on a fine September morning.

"Now, Uncle Karol, tell me all about this American engineer."

The Prime Minister was delighted at her transition. If he could once gain her complete acquiescence for the summary handling of the seditious young Prince, he would be fortunate.

"You mean, tell you all about the resumption of labor on the Royal State Railroad?"

The Queen shrugged. "After all, he is the storage battery, isn't he? They say he has arrived in the capital with a negro minstrel." She laughed. The Prime Minister, whom she always amused, took a chair near her and looked at her with indulgent affection.

"What sort of a person is he?"

"Good sort, rather a gentleman."

"How horrible!" she exclaimed. "I would prefer an out-and-out savage! After all, breeding isn't indispensable to the building of a proper tunnel."

"But if you have business dealings with a person, it is

nice to be able to talk at ease with them. Mr. Crossdale is an all-round sport, at all events."

"How did you discover that between Las Restaurus and the capital?"

"He shot his wolves," the Prime Minister listed Crossdale comfortably, "he rides; he was dignified and satisfactory during our sorrow." Here the Prime Minister crossed himself, and the Queen did the same, bowing her head. "And he was quite up to the mark in coming in to Karmania."

Here Karmen Mara laughed. "I didn't know it required such an enormous amount of courage to cross a mountain."

"In his case, however, it called for a certain amount of cool blood. He had heard of Baumgarten—"

"Ah!"

"And our poor Paul was killed the second night of Crossdale's arrival. After all this, he came quite tranquilly, knowing that he was under suspicion."

The Queen raised her eyebrows and gave a little shrug. Her smile was humorous as she said to her uncle: "Under suspicion *already?*" with a fine accentuation of the last word.

She took from the pocket of her sweater a thin gold cigarette case, with two or three cigarettes in it, and offered it to the Prime Minister. "Take one of these, Uncle Karol. They are a new kind from London."

The Prime Minister lit one. She put her racquet down on a chair and stood with her hands in the pockets of her sweater, her eyes bent on her Prime Minister. Thus, she looked less like a sporting woman and more like some one in authority. She was tall; she was full of vigor; her figure

was as slender and as supple as a boy's, but it was generous, too, with fine wholesome lines; shoulders which could carry the burdens of life, and her head was up; she held it up and held it well, with a level chin and a level gaze. The Prime Minister had risen immediately when she slipped off the table.

"Sarvanarof would use *anyone* who came to hand for a tool, if he wanted him," returned the Prime Minister. "Why not a civil engineer with official entry into the country, with our apparent confidence, with freedom to go where he likes, to see whom he chooses?"

"Does he speak Karmanian?" inquired the Queen.

"I am sure I don't know."

"Well," she said, with a little laugh, "he couldn't do a *great* deal of propaganda work in Karmania in the kind of *English* I have heard Americans speak."

It was wicked of her! It was tart! She began to walk slowly, with fine assured step, with the right length of step, too, for a tall woman, up and down the long high room in which they sat. It was a beautiful room, what it should be for a Queen's Council Chamber; small windows set in walls four feet deep—deep as wells; walls hung with flags won in old wars on those russet hills and plains beyond; ceiling banked, encrusted with color and in gold, bright centuries before and tarnished under Time's touch.

"I didn't think Americans took any interest in political intrigues of other countries."

"Oh," said the Prime Minister acridly, "*Americans* are a mixture of Germans, Polish, Italians, English and Dutch. There's no pure strain there as there is with us."

Karmen Mara stopped in her walk over by one of the small deep-set windows. "I'm not so sure, Uncle Karol, that there is any great advantage in the pure old strain these days. Good qualities become so attenuated."

Here the Prime Minister, who stood close to the long table on which his papers lay outspread, waiting for the Queen to set her hand and seal to them, asked abruptly, for some reason of his own changing the subject:

"How do you find King Peter, Karmen Mara?"

"Ill," said the Queen, "very, very ill. I don't see how he can live much longer, do you?"

All the light in her face seemed struck out as though by a wand. She came slowly back to the table, and sat before it in a dark curved armchair, covered with colorful silk-woven tapestry. In its ancient setting her figure and her face looked very young indeed.

"The King," she said colorlessly, "never changes. Yesterday he didn't know me, called me by all kinds of strange names. Today he knew me." And she continued: "I don't know which is the worst for me—the days he does know me or the days he does not. It is horrible altogether."

The Prime Minister leaned over and dipped a pen in the ink, put a document before the Queen and handed her the pen. She took it, held it in the air and said: "I see you've got your prisoner in your own tower?" The smile came back to her lips and the humor to her eyes.

"Oh," smiled the Prime Minister, "you mean Mr. Crossdale? I've put him in my round tower because we can see whatever he does so perfectly there; when he goes out and when he comes in, and who comes in and who goes out!"

"How delightful for the stranger within our gates."

The Prime Minister waited patiently until she should see fit to begin her morning's work.

"Would you like to meet Mr. Crossdale?"

She started and exclaimed, sincerely:

"Oh, horrors, no! Not on any account! I'm sure I don't have to, do I? Why should I?"

"For no reason in the world," said the Prime Minister, "excepting that you returned to the subject of this engineer."

"I had more than enough of Baumgarten," said Queen Karmen Mara, with a little shiver of disgust. "Dreadful man! I shall never forget his unpleasant personality. If he's a type of civil engineer—"

"Now this document," said the Prime Minister, leaning over toward it, "is the Royal Resumption of the farms and vineyards given over to free farming to the people ten years ago."

The Queen bent to it. "I oughtn't to sign it without reading it through," she said wretchedly.

"That," he said, "is just what we are all here for, you know—to save your Majesty boredom."

Karmen Mara gave a comprehensive glance at the documents, neatly set forth, with marks in red ink where her signature should be set, and before Karol could speak again, swiftly gathered them, like a pack of cards, and held them, laughing, rolling them together as though they were a roll of music.

"I must be bored, however, your Excellency," she said, with a charming inclination towards him, and falling with a remarkable ease into an authority which was hers and

which on their basis of uncle and niece she dropped entirely when they spoke on any important subjects. "These are the first papers I've had to sign since our armies were victorious, and I'm going to look them over, read them through before signing, if it gives me a headache, and if I sit up all night."

The Prime Minister in his turn bowed formally. "As Your Majesty pleases. I'm sorry you haven't sufficient confidence—"

"Oh," she exclaimed warmly, "I've made up my mind to understand everything from beginning to end." And in order to divert his thoughts she returned to the insignificant unknown civil engineer, and said with warmth which as she continued grew into passion:

"I return to this subject because it is so near my heart, this building of the road. This splendid scheme of ours, to connect Karmania with the river and the sea, it's the birth of our commerce, it's our touchstone with civilization. I realized in Paris what it was going to mean. I realized it every step of the way home, and naturally I'm interested to know if it's going through."

She sat on the table's edge and the Prime Minister, with a sigh of relief, took his ease in his chair, crossed his short legs, looked at his little finger ring, at his polished nails, and settled the stiff collar of his tunic. "The road will go through, Your Majesty."

Holding the roll of papers in her hand she leaned a little towards him and spoke in a low tone: "I've thought sometimes you didn't favor the scheme of the road."

Neither her face nor her ardent look stirred the Prime

Minister from his ease. "Remember I sent to the United States for this young man."

"But it was *our* scheme, you know, Your Excellency—Prince John's and mine. You know this. It was *our* dream."

"Now mine," said the Prime Minister patiently. "I am as interested in it as you are."

"I hope the man understands the limits set to his wanderings in the forest?"

"Oh, *quite*. He has all the north woods to roam in. It ought to be enough for him," the Prime Minister laughed, "when he's working. But he's an open-air man and he's given up a lot of leisure and out-of-door life to come here. I shall have to see that he has some outside life, meets some people." The Prime Minister wrinkled his brows, passed his hand across his short, well-kept beard.

"I shall never forget," said the Queen, with a little laugh, "the day we were picnicking by the spring and that dreadful Baumgarten in full Alpine regalia came stalking upon us, with an Alpine stick and his dreadful boots! I think," she continued, laughing again, "that he yodelled! I won't be sure, but I think he did."

The Prime Minister laughed; he could not help it. Then he rose with a sigh. "I came to transact important business with Your Majesty. Everything will have to await your pleasure. And I beg that Your Majesty will read these papers before tomorrow, because holding them up will seriously hamper us." He bowed over her hand and took leave.

"I see your *treja* at the door, stacked full of things, which I suppose you brought from Paris or London for your Birds?"

"Yes," she said regretfully, "I was going to take them myself."

At the curtain which he had lifted, for according to the etiquette which the Queen exacted, no one came in with the Prime Minister and no one let him out, he said: "I beg Your Majesty to read the documents."

"I promise you I'll read them before tomorrow," she said, with a sigh, "and I'll have to send Mariska to feed my Birds."

CHAPTER XVIII

IN A STRANGE COUNTRY A ROOF-TREE AND A LOAF OF BREAD
ARE NOT SUFFICIENT. (KARMANIAN PROVERB)

The limits for his walks were prescribed; north as far as he liked—to the Pole had he been able to get there; but on the left were the royal preserves and there he might not trespass. It was not at all in the line of an American citizen to enjoy being told where he might walk and where he might not. When these orders had been conveyed to Crossdale through Lieutenant Korvan, he demurred. "I wonder what she thinks I'll do to her old preserves? Eat them? Perhaps she is afraid I may see her at some dryad fete, or surprise her in a woodland bath!" Now as he tramped he looked back at little Savia on its hill.

"I bet the Queen doesn't know a United States citizen is living in this ol' shack, and I wonder how much she cares anyway about the Royal State Railroad—Better a smooth-browed peasant girl dancing the *whirra*, ready to throw herself against a man's breast, than an ice-cold woman who couldn't follow a man if she loved him because she's a Queen! She's a marionette!" he thought to himself. "Nothing but a puppet, a figure in a painted show, and they'll ring the curtain down on it pretty soon. I wonder where the Princess Mariska is, and how much she has to do with all that royal show?"

Fighting against his devilish mood, he tramped hard, and almost immediately struck the outskirts of the forest. He knew already many of the paths which led for miles through timberland. There were mountain climbs; there were walks where the sheer abysses went down above the mountain streams. And he was beginning to explore them all with a man's love for the woods. After two hours' steady tramp he became in tune with life. Vital, wholesome in his attitude toward it, he began to enjoy the beauty of the forest. Stanislas Korvan had already promised him sport and planned boar hunts for the coming winter, taking it for granted that Crossdale would remain. He tramped on, began to climb, then descended, the blood racing through him, growing every quarter of an hour more in shape and more fit.

Finally he came out on to a clearing in the pines where the ground before him was as smooth as velvet. He realized that he had never been there before and that he had lost his way. He looked at his wrist watch. It was after four. He had walked nearly five hours, and to lose his way in a forest such as this was no joke. He should have come out on to a woodcutters' camp, where the men were felling wood for ties for the new railroad. That was what he had really been making for.

Whilst he was debating whether to go back or to push ahead, he heard children's voices, laughter. He went forward softly over the piney earth. As he advanced he saw an extraordinarily civilized scene to be dropped down in the heart of a pine forest; a little log cabin, covered with luxurious rose vines, on which the roses were big and yellow like

suns; at the back of it a still smaller cabin, like a child's toy house, with a thatched roof and green doors and a low green fence; within the entry he saw a herd of goats with tinkling bells.

In front of the first cabin, a group of children in the native dress—striped petticoats, sandals and tight lace caps and little black smocked aprons—were singing and making a rosy ring. In the low doorway of the rose-covered hut stood a peasant girl, with a great loaf of coarse bread pressed against her breast, cutting the loaf in round slices and distributing it to the children, who one by one came up to get a slice.

The girl herself was the orchestra; she was singing for them to dance, singing one of the Queen's songs. Except her extraordinary beauty—and he had found out that many of the native women were raving beauties—there was nothing at first to distinguish her from the Karmanian peasant women, for she was dressed in the same fashion as were those women who danced the *whirra* and threw themselves against their lovers' breasts—striped skirt, coarse and high above the ankles; loose wide blouse; broad open collar, displaying her throat and neck; she wore no stockings, only wooden sandals; and over her skirt and blouse was tied a bright-blue apron, against which she pressed the coarse bread as she cut it through from crust to crust with a big, bright knife.

She was singing to the kiddies and calling to them, and her laughter, her voice, were as delicious as anything he had ever heard, even in Karmania, where music is as natural as the air. As she stood there, he knew her at once for the

Princess Mariska. She was the girl of the little photograph in California come true. There she stood, unbelievable, but truly so. She had grown up, yet she had remained a child. Now she came out from the low doorway, putting the bread on a wooden bench under the roses. The children ran to her.

He saw that she was a tall woman, and made as kind Fate makes certain of her favorites, to tempt, delight and satisfy. She picked two roses from the vines as though she could not resist them, put one above the top fold of her bright blue apron and another behind one of her ears, so that it shone against her dark hair.

Crossdale stirred and she started and cried out, and the children, like frightened birds, clung to her. He came forward. She turned white, then flushed a true country-girl red. He bade her good morning in Karmanian as gracefully as he could.

"Tola, tola, I am terribly hungry," he said. "I would give a kingdom if I had it for a piece of bread."

He stood looking at this Karmanian beauty quietly. He had a great deal of natural dignity, although he was a democrat from a country where there are no kings or queens or royal blood.

The two young people looked at each other as though they were primitive man and woman in that far-off forest, each an unexpected sight to the other. He had taken her in the moment he saw her, with a glad, wonderful leap of his heart. Ever since he had first stood on the other side of the photographer's window in Boston he had been charmed by her aspect; until today he had been dreaming of her. But that she could not know.

As far as she was concerned, since they had taken her away from the humble life in which she was born she had never talked to or seen so real a man as this. To the children she said: "Don't be frightened—he won't eat you. It is a stranger who has lost his way." And she looked at him and laughed deliciously. "You have lost your way, haven't you? Come into the hut, and I will give you some bread and goat's milk, too."

She scattered the children towards the fenced-in goats and another peasant woman, with two pails swung over her shoulders, came up and took them in charge.

Crossdale, in order to go under the low door, bent his head, and she brushed the lintel with her dark hair. They went in together, between the vines of yellow roses, she before him, supple, graceful, a girl of the wild woods, bare-foot and so alive! She drew him into a little kitchen, hung with blue and white ware, shining with pots and pans, and on a scoured table were pans of milk set for cream. She took a skimmer and skimmed the cream and filled a cup for him.

"Sit down on that stool—it is small, but it will hold you." She nodded to him in the most friendly fashion. She was gracious, but she was also wonderfully familiar. "You're miles from your quarters—you are Mr. Crossdale, of San Francisco, the American engineer?" She made him so perfectly at his ease, more so than any stranger he had ever seen, that he dared at a dash say to her what he had never dreamed he would have had the courage to say without a proper presentation.

"You are the Princess Mariska? I knew you at once."

He saw her start and blush scarlet. She exclaimed: "Really—really—how did you know, I wonder? How did you guess such a thing?"

He was delighted with his *debut*. "I saw a picture," he said, and waited.

"A picture of me?"

"Yes, in the taproom of the Cye inn—a good picture, better than most of those things usually are. It looks like you, and," he added, "I have seen another."

She seemed extremely amused, probably by his daring. She laughed a little and said: "How awfully, awfully funny!" just as any girl at home might have said, and a strange delight and joy and happiness ran through him. "Of course," she was saying, "Donora Mariska, the Queen's sister! It was awfully, awfully clever of you to guess!"

"Well," he thought to himself, "you are not the Queen, but you are nearly as bad—miles and miles away."

Her mouth was soft and red and desirable, with curves made for kisses; her eyes were blue-gray, flecked with black, her brows level, her lashes long; her skin warm in color, cool as a flower in texture. Under the loose frank blouse he could see the beauty of her throat. He knew now why he had come from far to this Oriental country, why Storm had been able to persuade him to come! He knew why he had bought the photograph of her so many years ago! He knew why he had been made a man, to love and to dream! This was his woman, born thousands of miles away from his birthplace, and put away from him by Fate immeasurably far. But she was for him, and nothing else in the world could ever count against if he could not have her for his own.

CHAPTER XIX

THE MORNING BIRD ASKS A QUESTION OF THE DAY WHICH THE NIGHT BIRD ANSWERS

"And so you're the American engineer!" At the other end of the low bench, facing him with elbows on the table, she linked her fingers together and stared over them at Crossdale. "How exciting it must be to build a railroad, no end of sport!"

She had cut off a slice of the loaf and spread it with butter. He had never in his life seen anything so brilliant as this dark girl, with the yellow rose above her bib and another trailing round her ear. It was a fairy tale come true, and since he had bent over a picture book when he was a little boy, he had never seen anything so charming. She took a spoonful of clover honey, brown and fragrant, out of a blue pot, and spread the bread with it. Then she held the loaf again against her bib, taking up a savage looking knife.

"Oh, don't do that!" exclaimed Crossdale. "It is a terrifying sight!"

"We all cut bread like that in Karmania—even the Queen cuts the bread at table. It is the custom here." She smiled, lifting her eyebrows slightly. "Eat your bread and honey. Don't you like it?"

"It is a feast!" he cried. But he watched her knife,

, fascinated, as it cut the bread through from crust to crust.

She drew in her underlip, over her strong white teeth, as though she might bite a rose, and as thus she looked down at her hand and the knife, he saw the charm of her regular features, the sweep of her lashes, the race in her, the pure strain; the fine wrist to which the full bare arm tapered, and the strong white hand. He tried to trace the mark of the brigand in her, of the breeding of the people. Certainly she looked every inch a princess, come from what class she might. He thought: "I don't wonder that the old King carried them off!" And a great yearning toward her and a jealous anger at the man who had taken this girl and her sister by force, filled him. He blushed for her for what had been in her past. He asked with difficulty: "Does the Queen take an interest in the Royal State Railroad?"

She stopped cutting. "Oh, a frightful lot, of course!"

Crossdale laughed and shook his head. "I don't believe it! What do women know about such things?"

He lifted his blue cup of luscious cream, like ivory. "I am sure," he said, "it is not etiquette to drink a toast to the Queen in milk, but here goes—*Heljen!*"

He blushed, and the Queen's sister blushed as well. Then she took a mug, reached over and touched his, then laughed out loud.

"You might call it a milk toast," she said, with the crinkles round her eyes and her mouth mirthful. "Her Majesty will be most awfully amused."

She settled herself comfortably again on the bench, leaning on the table, her dark head on one hand, the yellow rose close to her palm. The adventure amused her, it was

evident. He could not take his eyes from her wrist and her bare arm, where the loose shirt sleeve fell back.

"She is quite as royal as her sister," Crossdale thought, "and just as far removed from me as the stars in heaven."

"Don't you know that you are on forbidden ground? How did you ever find this place?"

And he said meaningly: "Oh, I believe I must have been coming to this place for a long time."

"Don't they obey regulations in the United States?"

"There are always law breakers, but I really lost my way."

"I don't like to tell you how strict the orders are here. It would have fared very ill indeed with you if the guards had caught you."

With apparent contempt for the laws against trespassers, he took another slice of bread and honey and said calmly: "I feel perfectly secure and completely within the law just at present."

"We obey in Karmania, and the higher up we are the more we respect obedience."

"It is very human to disobey and we spend most of our lives trying to evade rules made by ourselves. Now," he said, "won't you tell me what this little fresh-air fund is? Who are all these children?"

"It is a special charity of the Queen. There are lots of these little open-air schools throughout Karmania. We call them 'the Queen's Birds.' Do you like Karmania?"

And Crossdale said with enthusiasm: "I think it is the most beautiful little country I ever saw! It is like a splendid jewel."

"I'm glad, very glad indeed! There's nothing in the world

the Karmanians love as they love their country. The Queen is a great patriot."

"And you are, too!"

"Naturally. And all our hopes are centered now on the Royal State Railway."

She leaned forward, both arms on the table and her clasped hands a little toward him. Crossdale, who had hoped that she was interested in him as man, hated to think that she was interested in him solely because he was the engineer.

"The Queen," she said, "came back from Paris because the operations were to begin. You ask how much she knows about it—" the girl threw out her generous arms in a generous gesture. "She has followed the plans, she has read the contracts; it was she who sent to America to implore the Western Transportation Company to continue the work in Karmania. She can hardly wait for the day when she shall ride through the tunnel on a hand car."

Crossdale laughed out loud. "That's a good picture!" he said. "The Queen of Karmania on a hand car!" But he seemed to have offended her, for she drew herself up and said gravely: "You, from a great country with thousands and thousands of miles of rails, cannot appreciate what this little ribbon of steel is to our Kingdom."

He said quickly: "Oh, but I do! I think I must have appreciated it, don't you—I came from very far away to prove it!"

With one of her beautiful fingers she traced on the bare table. "You seem as fully interested in it as the Queen herself."

"We are sisters and great companions," she said quietly, and then sprang up from the table, as though she heard some one approaching the cottage, and went out of the door in a flash.

He did not know which was most wonderful—to see her move or to watch her as she sat quietly.

A man came up in hunting dress and she gave him minute directions, pointing, gesticulating. When she came in she said: "That's one of the foresters, Hazen. He will take you back. It wouldn't be safe for you to go otherwise, because, although you make light of them, the rules are very, very strict indeed."

This was his congee. He had forgotten that the time must come in a few moments when he would have to go, and that he would be unlikely to see her again like this.

Mariska seemed to be studying him, and asked abruptly, as he stood, hating to go and knowing that he must: "When do you begin your work on the road?"

"I don't know—I have been longing all day for something just like this."

She repeated his words: "Just like this?"

"For a homely scene and a woman's face."

"I understand," she said sympathetically. "It must be horribly lonely in Uncle Karol's brown tower."

"I shall go back to the United States."

She sank down on the wooden bench without the door and exclaimed: "Oh, I could never, never tell that to Her Majesty!"

Crossdale, his hands in his pockets, stood and looked down at her as though she had been an old friend. "Why

should I stay?" he said coolly. "Any ordinary civil engineer would do the work as well as I. You have only to send to Paris or London or Vienna for some one to replace me. It can be done in a week's time. There is really nothing for me here but a railroad and a tunnel. It used to be good enough, but it isn't any more."

She led the way to the gate and he followed her. The forester stood respectfully waiting. "This man is the head forester. He will see you safely back."

But Stephen was not to be shunted off like this. He wanted more than he had ever wanted anything in his life to return, but he did not let her see it, and put out his hand frankly. "Good night." She gave him hers so hesitatingly that he said: "Do you shake hands like that in Karmania?"

"Hazen has a lamp—it is growing dark. You will be quite all right. But I don't know how I shall ever tell Her Majesty this shocking news! What a dreadful and bitter disappointment."

She gave some final orders to the forester in Karmanian. When she spoke in English he thought her adorable; when she fell into her native language he liked her even better. They had reached the fence with the cedar pillar, against which she leaned, with her hands on her hips. What a woman she was! He had never dreamed that in his controlled and reasonable self were the powers of appreciation and delight that he felt now.

"I suppose nothing will change your decision?"

"I didn't say that."

She pointed to the little thatched houses over which the

evening sunlight was creeping. "It is homelike and sweet, isn't it, this little place here?"

His heart leaped; he was going to win out! Looking directly at her, holding her eyes with all the magnetism he possessed, he repeated: "Yes, it is homelike, it is too wonderful for words!"

Mariska put her hand out to him as any girl in the United States might have done. Then, just as he was beginning to take courage, a coldness came over her, a withdrawal, and he had a curious sense of being far away, of never having really spoken with her. She seemed to have gone to an immeasurable distance. "Goodnight," she said again. "You will be safe with the forester."

He was as struck by the dismissal as though she had dealt him a blow. Then, as he went through the little gate, he heard her say: "It won't be as far coming as going. Hazen will take you by a short cut." She emphasized it; she laughed unmistakingly, ravishingly, and repeated: "A short cut." It was an undoubted intimation that there was a means of return.

The windows of his tower were all open as he came up to it, under two hours later. Before he knocked at the door with the iron knocker he heard Jeff, secure in his solitude, singing:

"When you come to the end of a perfect day."

CHAPTER XX

WHEN A MAN SIGNS A CONTRACT FOR THE SAKE OF A WOMAN,
HE IMPERILS THE INHERITANCE. (KARMANIAN PROVERB.)

"Is there anything about me to indicate a man who has taken a vital decision, Jeff?"

Jeff Robinson was clearing away his master's late breakfast. Crossdale had slept until ten o'clock. Holding open the door into the kitchen with one foot, and the tray in his hands, Jeff gravely glanced his master over from his well set head to his boots.

"Notin' at all, Boss, 'ceptin' yo' ain' got on no cravat, Mister Crossdale."

"The deuce!" Crossdale put his hand up to his collar.

"And I am going to meet the Prime Minister in two minutes!"

He was filled with anxiety lest Prince Karol might not want him to stay in Karmania now, lest some unforeseen circumstance should have changed the Government's plans. Wouldn't he build the railroad for them! Wouldn't he run the tunnel through!

He glanced as he waited up at the little old city, then at the forest, and the dream he had dreamed up there changed life for him. He asked but one thing—to climb that magic path again. When could he decently go back? Tomorrow?

He had seen so many curious vehicles and means of

transportation since he had come that he would not have been surprised to see any old thing drive up under his tower window; but the smart little red wheeled cart, drawn by a snow white mule, alive with bells, driven by the Prime Minister himself, seemed too quaint to be true. This distinctly smart and debonair little equipage drew up before the tower. The Prince Karol got out comfortably from the back, in a gray felt hat and gray tweeds, a scarlet cravat, smoking a big cigarette in a long holder. He came unescorted, and he left his little mule to stand and nibble the grass heads with no one to attend.

Whilst he climbed the tower stairs, Jeff Robinson handed his gentleman a pencilled note with great secrecy, saying behind his big black hand: "Mister Lieutenant Korvan do say, read it quick, Mister Crossdale."

The engineer had just time to glance at it before Serga announced the Prime Minister. "For God's sake, Crossdale don't fail to ask to have me attached to your staff. Stanislas Korvan."

This was short, to the point, and Crossdale stuffed it in his waistcoat pocket with a grin. "That old boy is the clinging type," he thought to himself, "and sure to get his way. He will succeed, Korvan will!"

The Prime Minister came forward, beaming. "My dear Crossdale!"

And immediately the young man's hope rose high. "It doesn't look as though he were going to run me out of the Kingdom, anyway!"

"You have been here ten days, and I haven't had a chance to see how comfortable or how uncomfortable you

were." He looked around the study, took a chair in the deep window. "I always sit in this window." He indicated a chair on the other side of the green covered table. "Sit there, Crossdale, where I can look at you."

"Clever old boy! Knows how to seat his victims," Crossdale thought. "He's got all the light on my face."

"Hope you're comfortable."

"It's a bully place," said the American. "I like it immensely."

"I know of nobody else to whom I would give it. It was my studio; I used to study and draw a little here before I helped my niece to run our Kingdom." He laughed.

"If any one had ever told me I should be living in a tenth-century tower rising like a mushroom out of a plain in Central Europe, I should have thought he had delirium tremens." And he added: "If you'd come here yesterday, Your Excellency, I should have asked you to send me back to Tamaresk."

"Indeed!" The Prime Minister lifted his heavy eyebrows.

"I want to stipulate before I give you my answer," said the engineer, "one or two things."

"Stipulate!" Karol repeated the word with a fine accent.

"You think a prisoner in the tower has no right to stipulate!"

Prince Karol laughed. "What can we do for you?"

"I don't like to feel if I fall over a stump or climb a fence I would have a bullet under my jacket."

The Prime Minister nodded, laughing. "I see—the Queen's preserves!"

"I don't want my letters tampered with."

"And what more?"

"I'd like to have Lieutenant Korvan on my staff. You can enter him as interpreter, secretary, what you like. I need a native of discretion and authority to keep me wise."

The door leading into Jeff's kitchen opened and Jeff brought in black coffee, which he put down on the table. The Prime Minister drank his. "I see no reason why you should not receive your American letters."

"I have no other correspondence," said Stephen. "I give you my word of honor that I am not in communication with any country but my own."

The Prime Minister took from the pocket of his coat a package of letters which looked wonderfully good to Crossdale. "Here is your post, brought in today from Tamarek, intact. You find your colleagues—O'Dell and the others on the staff—sympathetic?"

"Oh, I find them quite all right, Prince Karol. They are on their jobs."

"Enlarge your pay rolls. Korvan will help you, and find you new overseers and paymasters."

"I shall rush the road through from Cye to Roda and beyond, and I dare say we'll corral a hundred or so of these dancing dervishes before the New Year."

"Then as for your machinery and working stock—Baumgarten's offices will do to begin with?"

Crossdale smiled. "When I see modern machinery and up-to-date compressed air drills, steel rails, dump carts, electric engines, and all the stuff I am used to, housed in

those scenery houses, it's a wonderful sight! The other day when I saw a squad of workmen taking off their white skirts and going off to the hydraulic pumps in red and blue tights, I nearly wrote a film story. It's a great show, Prince Karol! I shall winter in Cye in November, continue from there, but work from both ends, and leave O'Dell here."

The Prime Minister put his hand on the green cloth of the table and tapped the contracts. "Ready to sign?"

"I came from the United States to sign them. I won't go into working details with Your Excellency," said the engineer, "in regard to what I shall need. I'll talk it all out with Korvan and O'Dell."

The Prime Minister adjusted his glasses and bent over the papers.

"Her Majesty takes a deep interest in the Royal State Railroad, they tell me," Crossdale ventured.

The Prime Minister replied indifferently: "Railroads are not toys for women. She knows nothing about it."

"The deuce!" Crossdale thought. "The Prime Minister and the Queen's sister don't seem to agree on royal tastes!"

"We have a long autumn," said the Prime Minister, "here in Karmania."

Then he wrote under Stephen Crossdale's signature his five Christian names, ending with a flourish under the *Sarvanarof*.

"Here, at this red cross, the Queen will sign."

There were four contracts. The two men signed them and the Prime Minister put them in a red-leather portfolio, which he had brought in with him, and out of which

he now took a sheet of paper with the following note, and laid it down before Stephen Crossdale.

"This," he said, "is an understanding between you and me, Crossdale, a pledge of good faith on your side."

It was short and to the point:

"I agree not to leave the Kingdom of Karmania for a year from the thirtieth of September, 1920, to the thirtieth of September, 1921, without the permission of the authorities, and to receive no letters and to write none without the censorship of the Prime Minister's Cabinet."

It did not seem as though he could put his signature to that document. But as he hesitated, he seemed to see again the finger of Mariska. He might go back to his ranch, but there was no one like her in the U. S. A. He affixed his name.

"Good!" The Prime Minister possessed himself of the document. "You won't regret it."

As Prince Karol got into his mule cart, Crossdale threw out as though it were only a last thought: "You'll revoke those no trespassing laws, then, your Excellency?"

The Prince glanced benignantly along the broad white back of his mule and said, apparently to a point between the animal's ears: "But, yes, my poor Crossdale, why not? In your case things are very different—you are so enormously *persona grata* with us all. And, moreover, your peregrinations could not disturb Her Majesty's peace; she is leaving for Pratz Zenoe. She is taking her husband, His Majesty, for a rest cure. She will be gone for an indefinite period. So, my dear fellow, there is no reason on God's

earth why you should not have the freedom of the forests."

Prince Karol smiled affably on the young Californian, and drove peacefully off behind his intelligent beast.

Poor Crossdale, as he watched the little vehicle roll toward the high road, said to himself: "Done, by Jove! And sandbagged into signing the rottenest paper ever! Gone to some heathenish place—what was it? Of course there are no roads there—I expect they get there on snail back or something of that kind! But it won't do me any good, no matter how they go. Confound myself for a sentimental ass!"

The arrival of Karol in a mule cart and the picture of the Queen's sister in wooden sandals robbed the Kingdom of Karmania of a certain formality, and as Crossdale digested his chagrin at the Prime Minister's news, the door of his study was dashed open and Korvan leaped into the room. He caught the American round the waist and waltzed him round, crying as he did so: "Oh, Crossdale, you don't know what this means!"

The other shook him off. "What the devil—!"

The Karmanian, dishevelled, his monocle dangling, his freckles lost in the crimsoning up of his face, fell into one of the big chairs and held out a hand. "God bless you, old chap!" Then pulling himself together asked: "How in thunder ever did his Excellency let me go?"

"He didn't seem to mind in the least," returned Crossdale drily. "It looks as if you'd got that awful bug of self-importance, too."

The young man replaced his monocle, fished out a cigarette and in another second became the military-looking, con-

trolled young officer. "Seriously, though, old man, you can't dream what you have done for me."

Very much later the engineer remembered the officer's excitement at this release from his military duties, the change of regime for him. It gave him an unhopd for freedom in the Kingdom.

"I don't know how I can ever repay you!"

Crossdale threw himself down on the green lounge running along the wall under Prince Karol's books on sport and linking his hands behind his head, laughed. "That's all right—if you really feel all this tremendous indebtedness I dare say we can fix up a way in which you can work off some of it right now."

Instantly Korvan looked suspicious. "Well—" he said tentatively.

But Crossdale took the fence; he had gone too far. "Tell all you know about the Princess Mariska." He was thinking of her deeply and very little of the Karmanian, but he could not but notice the profound effect his demand produced.

Korvan murmured: "*The Princess Mariska!*" and his jaw dropped. "But *why* on earth specially her?"

Instantly the American regretted that he had asked this and he was rather confused. It would only make his interest conspicuous to this man, attached to him so arbitrarily now. "I expect I am giving my head to the lions!" he thought to himself.

"Well, I rather liked the looks of the picture we saw over in the Cye taproom. She's some girl, Korvan!"

A look of relief crossed the Karmanian's face. He threw back his head, laughing. "Oh, *that* chromo!"

"Is she married to a duke or to one of those old Solomon Johnnies that seem to stoke up their harems in this part of the country? Poor girl!"

"Neither the one nor the other," said the Karmanian peacefully. "She isn't married to anyone yet."

"Then she's got a good chance for a proper love affair, hasn't she? I suppose she's gone with her sister to that hot-air haunt up there, wherever it is?"

And Korvan helped him: "Pratz-Zenoe? Yes, that is our fashionable spa on the way to Cye by the plains." And he added with some feeling: "Between you and me, old top, I don't think they will ever bring His Majesty back—he can't possibly live till spring."

"Ah," nodded the American, "you mustn't expect me to cry about it, Korvan. Between you and me, I don't know of anybody that it would give me more pleasure to shoot than that old reprobate. Don't talk to me about him! Ever since I heard about his kidnapping, I can't wait until I hear the bells ring for his entrance into the next world. But I suppose, as far as the Princess Mariska is concerned, I shall have to wait."

And the other man asked quickly: "Wait for what?"

Crossdale laughed. "To compare her with the picture."

"Seriously, Crossdale, now that you and I are going to be together, I shall have to warn you on all sorts of things, I am afraid. You remember what I told you about the pictures of the royal family? The Cye inn proprietor served thirty days in gaol for exhibiting the Princess Mariska's picture."

"Poor old boy!" said the American sympathetically. Kor-

van had sprung up and was walking round the room as he talked.

"Quit walking round like a bear, Korvan. Let's get to business. Baumgarten may have been a bounder, but he was pretty well fixed up as far as modern machinery goes. With what is on the premises we can continue operations until the spring—that is, if you will get the Prime Minister to authorize me to buy a lot of war dump that I know is hanging round within a few miles of Tamaresk on the Roumanian frontier." Korvan listened.

"There are a whole lot of valuable war shanties. We can use them and use the timber. Besides that there's an outfit of electric engines, cars, compressed air drills, pretty nearly everything shipshape and in good condition. Now," said Crossdale, "we'll get that in," and he looked at Korvan and smiled, "how, old boy? It's good rolling stock, but it can't walk over from where it's lying now."

"Oh," said Korvan, "that's easy. We will carry it in as we carry in everything else, by mule and oxcart."

"It is at Gieurgevo," said Crossdale, "about an hour from Tamaresk, and we'll get busy and order it sent in. How long will it take?"

Korvan mused. "Well, this is September. We ought to have the whole lot in Cye by November first."

"Good!" said Crossdale. "That is the right time."

The news that the Prime Minister had given him at the wheel of the mule cart had made the rose-covered cottage seem for the present a thing of dreams. He said indifferently: "No man likes to be barbed-wired off as though he were a tramp or a poacher. However, that's settled."

"I understand," said Korvan, "that you didn't like the 'no trespassing' on the Queen's preserves." He looked amused. "You see, *Baumgarten* was a bounder, and a traitor."

"Oh, *damn* Baumgarten."

"Decidedly," said Korvan. "He was that kind! But he gave civil engineers a bad name. He had neither discretion, tact, nor good manners." After a second he said seriously: "They're on Prince Sarvan's trail, I'm afraid."

"You don't mean," said Crossdale, "that there is serious justice in this little house of cards, do you, Korvan?"

"Death," said the other, "is always serious, isn't it?"

"Bad as that?" said Crossdale.

"There was a Privy Council meeting at four yesterday afternoon, and the Queen demanded the Prince's safe conduct, but the Prime Minister was too much for Karmen Mara. She made a fine appeal, though, and when she saw that she wasn't gaining headway, left the Council Chamber royally, I assure you, Crossdale—although you don't believe in our forms and traditions."

"Why," said Crossdale, "the old man Karol is quite a power! But I like it in the Queen." Korvan's picture of the Queen pleading for her old playmate attracted him. It was only when human touches gave warmth to the picture of her that he thought of her except in connection with her sister.

Korvan went over to the big table and began to stir among the papers in which he felt a new interest. "I can't wait to get to work with you, I can't wait!"

But Crossdale was musing. "Oh, I can," he said. "I can always wait to begin, and when I've begun, then I can't

stop. Where is this home for broken-down kings they are going to take the old Johnny to?"

"Pratz-Zenoe—it's on the borders of Roumania, to the west, near Cyé," said Korvan, "on the other side of the mountain."

Crossdale looked up. "You don't mean," he said, "that they are going to transport that dying old gentleman above our unborn tunnel, do you?"

"Oh, no," said Korvan, "not by any means—they go round. It's a long journey, though."

Standing by Korvan's side, watching the Karmanian handle the papers he knew so well, Crossdale said: "O'Dell can direct the mining operations from this end for the present. Now, how many men can you get me on the payroll on the other side of the mountain by October first?"

"How many do you want?"

"Well, we don't want to use more than two hundred and fifty native laborers on the whole tunnel project, Korvan. Now, as for the road, that's different. My plan is to work on the Cyé side from November and we'll pop over and continue this side after the snows have gone."

"You can always come round by Pratz-Zenoe," Korvan told him, "if you don't mind cold feet and a frozen nose crossing the plains in storms and snow."

Crossdale laughed. "I don't mind crossing anything," he said, "if what I want is on the other side."

CHAPTER XXI

HE FINDS AN EMPTY NEST, BUT HE TRAPS A FOX

Early next morning he took the little climbing path again, retracing the steep incline by which Hazen had led him down. Before he got to the clearing he listened for the children's voices, but only the tap of a woodpecker on a far-off tree broke the stillness. The clearing was empty, flecked with sun and shadow, and through the trees he could see the settlement. The little green doors were shut, windows and shutters closed, the toy houses ready to be put back into the ark. The game was over! A sense of defeat and disappointment and irritation came with the sight. What a fool he had been! She had not meant him to come back. She had sent him home the shortest way and had meant nothing by it. He had been the duffer! He was the goat! Nevertheless, he found himself drawn magnetically to the little dairy house and went to the window from which one of the shutters was slightly drawn, and there on the broad stone of the sill, close to the vine, he saw a three-cornered pencilled note held down by a couple of stones. It was addressed in a round, full hand: "To the Man Who Lost His Way."

A feeling of gladness rushed over him, of great surprise and delight. For a second it made almost no difference that she was not there. Standing by the rose vine, he read the note:

"If you are what I think you are you will come here today and find this note. A man who can build roads can find them, too. Sometime in November—at the Queen's lodge at Cye."

The words were printed as a child might print them, in bold characters. The triumph of it struck Crossdale almost like a blow and brought her before his vision, gracious, warm and vital. What a fine, clean cut girl she was! He could see her standing there laughing, with the crinkles about her eyes.

He read the little slip of paper twice. It said so much and so little. This was September. "The Queen's lodge at Cye—sometime in November." Two months! What a sport she was! He put his hand on the little house and patted it as though it had been a kitten. He picked a yellow rose with a sort of humorous reverence, and put it with the note in his pocket, then walked slowly away from the dolls' houses, dreaming like a boy. She wanted to see him again! It was too good to be true. What could she have seen to like in him? Whereas the man did not live who would not be carried away by her. Two months! Did it take the old King all that time to decide whether he was going to live or die? Why should he need the whole court with him to help him make up his mind? If the Queen were on her job, why could not Donora Mariska stay at home?

Dreaming, musing, turning over the charm of it in his stimulated mind, Crossdale walked slowly back through the clearing to the path, and as he struck it saw the figure of a man moving among the trees and saw him step quickly behind a pine. Crossdale made a spring to where the man stood, caught him by the shoulders, turned him round and

looked into the face of Refan Ugo. The fact that this man was spying on him infuriated Crossdale.

"You damned blackguard," he said between his teeth, "see if you can give me as good as you are going to get!"

In another second the men had closed in primitive hand-to-hand, body-to-body fight. The Slav was wiry and in training, but the American was the better man by all odds, even if he was angry. He fought with the fury of a man pursued, spied upon, and an anger possessed him at the unfairness of the chase. A kingdom against one man! He was merciless. He threw the spy and twisted his hand in the man's collar until he realized that he had to stop. Then he threw him from him, gathered himself together and watched Ugo come to life.

The spy sat up, gurgling, and Crossdale leaned down and loosened his collar and his cravat. "You're not as bad as all that. Buck up! Listen to what I've got to say."

When Refan Ugo had his breath and had struggled to his feet, he leaned against a tree for support, panting, little the worse for the throw down. "So that is the way you are taking in order to ingratiate yourself with your chief, is it, Ugo? You think that he will reinstate you if you give him some new proof of your efficiency? Well, I have only given you what was coming to you, and I have had it in for you ever since Tamaresk."

"Let me get my wind."

Crossdale sat down on a stump. He had not even taken off his coat, torn a little on the shoulder where the spy had grabbed it. He took out a cigarette, lit it, watching the other. "As soon as you can walk, start out, and keep in

front of me. And I want to tell you that I don't go about like a nursery maid. I've got something in my hip pocket that will settle everything with you, old chap, and I'd just as soon shoot you from the back as any other way. You come home with me and we'll talk things over by the kitchen fire."

In the tower study Crossdale seated the spy with the light on his face. They had been observed by no one as they went up the little stairs and Crossdale let himself in with his key.

"You and I are going to have this out between us, Refan Ugo."

Since Crossdale had struck him in the face with his fist the spy had not spoken a word except to ask to be allowed to get his breath. "How long have you been on my trail?"

"Ever since you arrived."

"Good," said Crossdale. "Of what am I suspected?"

"Of being the agent of Prince John Sarvanarof."

"Astute!" said the American. "And what have you handed in?"

"Nothing as yet."

"How did you happen to track me into the forest this morning?"

"Saw you start from here."

"Didn't get much out of it, did you?"

"Except that you took something from the window of the Queen's dairy, nothing."

"Do you know what that was?"

"You got there before I did." How much of what Ugo

said was true, Crossdale had no possible means of finding out.

"Ugo, I had just as soon drill you through and blow you up with dynamite as anything I can think of! Have I ever been up to those little dolls' houses before that you know of?"

"No," the man said frankly. "I know you haven't been. You would have been shot if you had trespassed on the Queen's preserves."

"Right," said Crossdale coolly. "This was the first time."

"You've been given permission to wander as you like since yesterday, and that was the reason I followed you there today."

"I am going to be frank with you, Ugo," the American said slowly. "My life is worth a certain amount to me, and so is yours, I guess. You can, when you go out of this place, give me over to the authorities of this little inquisition of yours, and that is what you're going to try to do. I'm only one man here against a kingdom."

He put his revolver on the table. The spy took out a little notebook with a rubber strap around it, and handed it over to Crossdale, and brought out also two letters for him, with the seals unbroken, and two wires.

"These," he said, "came this morning for you. I was to deliver them to Lieutenant Korvan today, after handing them to the Prime Minister. From now on all your mail will come to you clear. Open my notebook."

Crossdale did so, and on the page that he opened at he read: "Mr. Crossdale gives absolutely no cause for suspicion of any kind so far."

"Fine!" exclaimed the American, with a short laugh. "I

never felt so perfectly at home in my life as I do here! Fill it full of poetry like that, and that's all I ask of you."

"Mr. Crossdale, have you any proposition to make me that I could accept?"

The engineer fixed him with his keen, intelligent eyes. "Well, I don't know. Rather, I do know—any proposition I made you would be immediately catalogued against me, turned over to the Prime Minister in a few hours. Isn't that so?"

"No," said Ugo. "I am just as interested in my own future as any man is, and I am up to any good proposition. You could not buy me if I was not sure of your loyalty to the Queen and to the monarchy. I am sure of that, and whilst you are in Karmania you can count on me."

"What did I take from the window sill of the little hut in the woods?" He was perfectly convinced that Ugo had not come up in time to see what he had really taken.

"I have no idea."

Crossdale took the yellow rose from his pocket. "This rose. I raise these yellow roses in California—I wanted it for a specimen."

The spy bowed respectfully. "I understand perfectly. I am something of a gardener myself."

"Good!" said Crossdale. "Most of the ill and most of the good in the world started in a garden."

Ugo went over to a mirror and settled his disarranged clothing, put himself in order.

"You studied ju-jitsu in your country, Mr. Crossdale?"

"I can play football a little," said the young man.

"The next time you see his Excellency," said Ugo, "you

will see that I have proved my good faith. Things will change for you in the kingdom."

"It is just as well they should," said Crossdale coolly, "and as far as you are concerned, let me warn you, Ugo, that I don't hesitate to shoot on sight if I think it is the thing to do, and take the consequences."

Here Crossdale heard the sound of steps on the stairs without and Jeff's voice. "Come in!" he said, as Jefferson Robinson rapped at the door.

Jeff opened it, to allow the mad entrance of Bela and Tristan, who entered the tower room like catapults, barking, crying, whining. They sprang upon Crossdale, they licked his hands and his feet. His surprise and delight at the sight of them was great.

"Why, you old hounds!" he said affectionately. "Why, you old boys! Who's coming after you, I wonder? Who is the next pair?" In the door behind Jeff stood Serga and a tall native, in the house livery of the Queen.

"Your Excellency," said Serga, "this man has brought the wolfhounds with the Prime Minister's compliments. They are a present to you."

How they whined and fawned! Bela was down at his feet, on her belly, with her nose on his boot, in an attitude of the most remarkable submission, as though she came and called him master.

"Good night," he said to the spy. "I shall see the Prime Minister in a few days, and I shall know what to do with you afterward."

When he was alone Crossdale made himself at home with his dogs. He was wild about them. He did not know which

one was the most appealing—the darker Tristan, with his intelligent eyes, or the more affectionate female, with her humble devotion. He wanted to be alone with them, whom he could trust, and to sit there before his table piled with work and finger the queer little printed note again and re-read it, this curious little communication to him from a strange woman in this unfriendly country.

He sat down facing the window, which looked out on the climbing hill town of Savia, with the meadows between, and spread out the little bit of paper before him on the green cloth.

“To the Man Who Lost His Way.” (He had not lost it—he had found it!) “If you are what I think you are—” It meant that she thought about him, wondered about him, that she had formed an opinion about him. She knew that he was not afraid and that he wanted to come back. “—you will find roads as well as build them. Sometime in November. At the Queen’s lodge at Cyé.”

He thought to himself: “If, as Ugo says, I’m under surveillance, of course the Queen knows and so does she. They think that I’m plotting with Sarvanarof to overthrow this little petty kingdom! If she knows anything about me she thinks that I’m a rotten anarchist, a Bolshevik, an intruder.”

He mused on the letter, so unexpected and so full of suggestion. And the yellow rose lay beside it crushed, as it had been crushed against his body and had borne the brunt of the hand-to-hand fight with Ugo. It was fragrant. He touched it gently.

He said to the dogs, who stood one on each side of him, in the position they took from then on: “I can speak the

language you were brought up in, boys, and we understand one another, and I don't feel quite so alone. There's Jeff and you and me and this rose, and we're all right! But I can't be sure even yet about the letter!"

CHAPTER XXII

THE QUEEN INVERTS THE PROVERB: "LOVE ME LOVE MY DOG"

"Since the dogs approve of him, why not make him a present of Bela and Tristan?" As the Queen spoke, the two wolfhounds, stretched out asleep on their sides like dead dogs, in the warmest patch of sunlight on the terrace, gave sign of life. Tristan slapped his tail indolently; Bela, the female, came to where the Queen sat and laid her head on the low table, level with her neck.

Karmen Mara was eating green figs, decorative and luscious in a glass dish with their leaves round them, and she ate them with the air of a connoisseur, of an epicure; broke them open and dipped their pink pulp into a dish of cream at her side. Bela watched her, but eliciting no attention, returned to the sunlight and lay down. Her Majesty was at a very late breakfast on the southern terrace, hanging out over the moat. From here the view of the little crumbling, falling-down-hill town was lost, and over the balcony rail the Queen looked on pastures white with sheep, on rolling farms and fields and a winding stream, blue as a peacock's feather, and on the hill line that separated Karmania from Roumania and Russia.

The confused, indistinct murmur of an Oriental community came humming, droning, calling up to her, always musical, and the voices seemed to call her. She could hear them often crying "*Heljen! Heljen!*" and thrilled always, in

spite of the fact that she had heard it for over eight years, for she had been crowned when she was sixteen, on her marriage to the old King.

His back to the view and his face towards his sovereign, the Prime Minister reclined in a wicker chair, his short legs crossed, his soft felt hat on the floor with his stick and gloves. He was enjoying the Anglo-Saxon pleasure of a pipe, caressing the bowl with his well-kept hand. "Your Majesty is breakfasting very late."

"I slept badly last night," said the Queen cheerfully. She did not look it. She had a distinct air of assurance, the unmistakable look of a young woman who had come from a minute and careful toilette; of a young woman used to cold showers and cold baths and regular exercise and proper hours. On this special morning she was the expression of good health and good spirits.

"You should not sleep badly at your age," said the Prime Minister. "You work too hard—your light burned in your study until after one o'clock."

Queen Karmen Mara paused, a fig between her two fingers. "Do you keep tab on the hours of your prisoner in the tower? I shall draw my blinds, although I like to see the night as well as I like to see the day." She gave a little shrug and ate the fig.

"Sentinels must report, my dear," said her uncle. "What would you think if no one watched your safety? This morning I simply read the usual report."

"I was writing a new song last night," said Karmen Mara meditatively. "And afterwards I had all sorts of nonsensical dreams, so I slept late to catch up." Over her

shoulder she said to the servant who stood behind her chair: "Paulus."

"Your Majesty."

"You will take Bela and Tristan—" Here both dogs got up definitely, came over to her. They knew that there was something serious in the mention of their names, and ready to be at hand they stood on either side of her chair as they had stood on either side of Crossdale's chair down in the forest lodge. Since coming to the castle they had been combed and washed and brushed, and their long coats shone like silver. Each dog wore a heavy silver chain over green leather with the royal coat of arms. They were royal looking animals and the expression in their eyes was more than royal. Tristan put his feet on the arm of the Queen's chair and tried to lick her face. She put him down gently.

"You will take Bela and Tristan to the tower and present them to the American engineer, Mr. Crossdale, with the Prime Minister's compliments."

"At once, Your Majesty?"

"When I have gone out to ride. Leave them for the present." And to her uncle she said: "I wouldn't want them to know I have given them away. You may go, Paulus."

"My dear girl," said the Prime Minister, taking his pipe out of his mouth and looking at her severely, "what on earth did you do that for?"

"Oh, I don't know," said the Queen. "Spanish politeness—when a guest admires something, you give it to him!"

"You would give your kingdom to a mountebank, if I were not here to keep watch over you."

The Queen had finished her breakfast. After giving each of the dogs a fig, which they ate appreciatively, she dipped her fingers in the bowl and wiped them and put her napkin down and turned her chair from the table. "Only *half* my Kingdom—that's the classic form, isn't it? 'Even to the half of my kingdom.'"

Now that she turned about in her chair one could see that she dressed with originality. She wore a sort of Cossack boot of white leather with red heels; a morning boot to be slipped on quickly and off as quickly; a short white skirt of thick homespun woven in the kingdom; and over this a silk jacket of a pomegranate color, richly embroidered, again the work of Karmanian women, low at the neck—and she could stand for it, for her neck and the column of her throat were superb; and over her closely curling hair, dressed so close that it had the appearance of being short like a boy's, a round, embroidered cap like her tunic, and it covered her head all but the escaping curls of dark hair.

Her face was piquant and brilliant, full of humor, but on the lips and in the eyes there was fire and passion and much spirit, and in the deep indentures of her mouth and in the pallor of her face, mobile and expressive, there was feeling, no end of it. There was character, no end of it.

"Half of my kingdom," she repeated, in a low tone, and got up and came and leaned on the terrace close to her uncle, and spread out her hand toward the south.

"Decidedly not that half," she murmured, "not that rich and glorious south! Isn't it beautiful, Uncle Karol? What woman ever had a more heavenly little land to reign over? —Not the south, then."

She stood with both hands on her hips, looking down and smiling at the Prime Minister, who, by an imperious gesture not to be disobeyed, she had forbidden to leave his chair.

"And decidedly not the half with Mount Nepta and my forests and my hunts and the splendid little railroad to run along, and the prospective tunnel and the dungeon *and* that American engineer! And they tell me—I had to go to Paris to learn it, your Excellency—that somewhere in the kingdom there is oil!"

Here Karmen Mara folded her arms across her breast and the Prime Minister disobeyed her and rose. "What do you know about oil, your Majesty?"

"I burn it at midnight."

He placed a chair for her and she sat beside him, inclined to talk, keeping him, although she knew that he lunched early and the hour was crawling near his time. It was one of her caprices to detain this Prime Minister here at her own pleasure until she obtained from him what she wanted.

"You will miss those dogs horribly—that's one of your mad impulses. What can they possibly mean to this stranger?" Prince Karol put his pipe down on the stones of the terrace, by the side of a thick leather portfolio, stamped with his crest and arms—a handsome, business-like looking article, evidently full of papers.

"For the next few weeks Savia will be full of workmen. It will be difficult for you to go on your tramps, and heaven knows it's dull enough for you here—I realize that! But in December we will have the Bukarest players come and some first-rate cinema films from London and Paris."

An expression of pleasure crossed her charming face. "How awfully kind of you, uncle Karol!"

"I realize how stupid it is for a young and good looking woman like yourself in the capital."

The girl laughed. "I'm not the *only* lonely pebble on the beach! There's your railroad builder, your tunnel borer! Is *he* young and good looking, too?"

"I am just come from him, by the way." Karol glanced down at his hat and stick and gloves. "He looks like all healthy, well-set-up men—clean and solid; and I dare say he is rabidly lonely."

Karmen Mara threw up her chin and laughed out loud. As she did so, her little round cap fell off on the terrace floor. Bela instantly put a paw over it and held it between her paws, guarding it, and the Queen's head like this was bare to the sunlight and the morning breeze, which rustled, as though they were bits of crimson paper, the leaves of the scarlet Virginia creeper covering the rails and the stone of the balcony.

"You will have to import people with the material for the railroad," said the Queen. "Whom, in heaven's name, will you ask this American to meet? The fat wife of the Minister of the Interior?—the one who asked me to bring her her new set of false teeth from Paris (and I brought them, by the way—ugh!) Or some of those overfed Savian beauties—the ones who order their dresses from the Bon Marche by catalogue?"

The Prime Minister took his red portfolio from the balcony rail. "I've got his contracts here, by the way. His papers are all *en regle*, signed and sealed, and when

you've affixed your signature, they will be ready for delivery."

Queen Karmen Mara held out her hand. "Let me see how this American signs his name," she said, "his democratic name." She looked at the signature. "Well, it's honest, intelligible. I don't think he'll walk off with the tower on his back, as the women carry the straw and the wheat. What's this?"

"Oh!" said the Prime Minister, trying to take the paper from her hand. "That's not in the lot!"

Karmen Mara gave him one swift glance, retained the paper and read it through.

"Oh, how abominable!" she said, in a low voice. Her eyes, which could be as grave as they were humorous, fixed in seriousness upon her minister. "You made that man sign this disreputable paper?"

But the Prince only sat down a little deeper in his chair and crossed his legs, looking at his light shoe and its white spat with approval. The Queen had brought these gaiters with the false teeth and other commissions from London, and they were to his taste, for he was a great dandy.

"As I have told you before," he said impressively, "he is under surveillance and will be for the present."

The Queen methodically tore to bits the sheet of paper which Crossdale had signed that morning and let the pieces fall on the floor, and Bela and Tristan sniffed at them.

"Middle Ages, indeed! You've gone back to them!"

And she changed as an inland sea changes under the wind. Karmen Mara became the woman and the capricious,

humorous girl vanished. She sat up straight in her chair with a hand on each arm.

"Your Excellency, I read over the documents you've given me to sign."

"Yes," said the Prime Minister coolly, "the Privy Council meets at four this afternoon and I must file these documents and give them to the Minister of the Interior."

The Queen clapped her hands twice, and a servant came immediately, as though he revolved out of the door of a cuckoo clock. "Fetch me all the writing things on my table in my study, as well as the portfolio."

The man was gone but a second or two, during which time, however, neither the Queen nor the Prime Minister uttered a word. Prince Karol lit a cigarette and the Queen sat immovable with a hand on either arm of her chair, musing.

The man returned and laid out upon the table, which had been cleared of the Queen's breakfast things, writing materials and a sheaf of documents. Then the Queen went over to the table, and the Prime Minister watched her keenly, used to her caprices—also imagining, not without reason, that she was in his hands and he could make of her what he willed.

Karmen Mara tapped the documents. "I've signed those—they are of minor importance. But this paper," and she held up the withdrawal of the lands of the peasants from their present owners and their return to the Crown, "is a feudal disgrace."

The Prime Minister took possession of it and she did not make any demur. "I'm sorry," he said sternly, "that you feel like this. It is drafted by the Parliament and by myself."

"I dare say!" said the Queen bitterly. "It's the drawing in the meshes of your absolute monarchy, Prince Karol. I refuse to sign that paper."

The Prime Minister placed the document in his red portfolio.

"And this poor American engineer—he must be free to write his love letters without your reading them." She tried to laugh, to collect herself, and Prince Karol put out his hand.

"Good-bye, my dear," he said. "I must go to luncheon. It will be ruined and I shall be in an impossible humor at the Council. Since you're so interested in Mr. Crossdale's correspondence—I gave him all his letters in their virgin state, just as they came from his vulgar republic."

"Were they love letters?" asked the Queen.

"I dare say," answered Prince Karol. "A handsome young man would have love letters—and write them."

"Decidedly," she agreed, and added: "And write them well!"

"I have given him Lieutenant Korvan for his adjutant."

"Splendid!" exclaimed the Queen. "Stanislas will never set the Danube on fire, but he is a good friend and Mariska will be delighted. She is so awfully keen for him to get on, and she hates the army. You know, uncle Karol, we shall have to let those young people get married."

"I must go," said the Prime Minister. "I shall be late for luncheon."

She gave him her hand in signal of return to better understanding. His power over her was great.

"Come to dinner with me after the Council, uncle Karol, won't you? I shall miss the dogs."

CHAPTER XXIII

CROSSDALE IS ROYALLY COMMANDED TO DRINK A CUP OF TEA

By November the staff of the Royal State Railway was definitely installed in Cye, Crossdale camping in a peasant hut, which Korvan had found for them near the town, and they would not see the other side of Mount Nepta before the spring. Baumgarten's equipment had been completely modernized, and by the use of up-to-date drills and the latest models in electrical material they were expediting the mining of Nepta and the expulsion of the waste material steadily. They looked forward with fair assurance to seeing daylight through the rock in May.

Crossdale had in all two hundred and fifty laborers, working in squads between Savia and Cye, and already the one-track road was laid from Cye to Roda. The war dump had been brought in from Roumania to Cye by trail and over the rails. Crossdale's and Korvan's quarters were primitive—a cubby-hole of a kitchen, a bedroom shared by them, and a general room in which they ate and worked by the light of a swinging oil lamp, warming themselves in chill evenings by a peat fire on the floor, the chimney open to the sky.

Of Refan Ugo the American had heard nothing since he had parted from him in the tower.

Korvan was away much of the time and explained his absences by an excuse of military duty. But Crossdale asked

no questions and expected no confidences. He was sure that there was a woman in Korvan's life, but whom she was he had no idea.

Jefferson Robinson had grown frankly disgruntled and entirely out of sympathy with his Oriental life: "Scuse me, Boss—ah sure don' wan' to put no spoke in de wheel ob cibilization, but dis hyar job is gettin' to be one too many fo' me! B'lieve me, Mister Crossdale, ah'm goin' to git in line fo' a return ticket."

Crossdale had been troubled about the man for some time here in Cye. His face was cast in the most profound melancholy.

"Ah don' know what ah'm sickenin' fo'. Sometimes ah t'ink it's fo' home food."

Crossdale understood and sympathized. "People of your race don't usually sicken for work, Jeff, but that's the matter! I'll give you fifty men to handle and teach you your job, and then when you've got a few minutes off you can go to see the cinema in Roda."

The man's face brightened. "Fine, Boss! Yo' sure am talkin.' Ah neffer use' to serbe de directors on dere private cars but ah us' ter feel dere wus sompin' in dat line comin' ma way. Ah ain' been on fast trains twenty-five years to end up hyar wid no transportation but a sled in summer time an' a mule."

"Look at him, Korvan!" Crossdale said to his companion, a fortnight later. "He's the real nigger—nothing in the world they care for so much as display!"

Crossdale had placed Jeff on the line beyond Roda. The negro had rigged himself up in a cast-off suit of his master's,

the trousers stuffed into a pair of high Karmanian boots. It had been easy in that land of color to possess himself of a red shirt, and he wore one, with one of Crossdale's old soft felt hats. He was smoking one of the long black Karmanian cigars; he had on a pair of Crossdale's evening gloves, white kid, rolled down at the wrist; he carried a small baton.

"God knows what language he talks to them in, Crossdale, but he's well on his job!"

Stephen wrote to Storm:

"All serene on the old Danube. Working in from the Cye side. Things are in fairly good shape. If all goes well I ought to be able to establish my communications between Cye and Savia in May. I dare say I'll be kept here pretty well through May. I can't slip you any tip about the oil yet, old man, although I'm getting ready to look into the matter.

"Why don't you come out to the woods yourself and look things over with me? The hunting's great. I've gotten boar and stag among other things. There'll be bears later.

"To get back to the oil wells, the Queen dissolved the Parliament and herself in tears, but when Parliament opens they are sure to get their way in the matter, and I'd like to get busy before that time."

One Sunday Korvan had taken him over to the next village to the wine festival, and Crossdale had watched with enthusiasm the vineyard dance, until the ravishing savage music, the melody and the charm had been too much for him, and he had suddenly sprung up and before the Kar-

manian knew what he was doing, he had cut 'in, dancing with verve and spirit, extricating himself, however, before the belle of the afternoon had thrown herself in his arms.

"That's a great little dance," he said to Korvan, as he came out, breathless and delighted. "The 'bunny hug' and 'the shimmy shake' haven't got a thing on it."

In his pocket, in his leather case, he kept the printed letter he had found on the window sill of the cottage. He read it many times. "Sometime in November—" and when the month came he began to wonder.

One day at noon, during an inexplicable absence of Korvan's, he heard the bells of Cyé begin to ring in the most peculiar fashion. Bells hang from every conceivable place from which a bell might hang in Cyé—indeed, throughout Karmania. They seem to collect them, to have a passion for them. They hang them, ring them, burst forth on all possible occasions, with surprising volubility and great musical quality. The American loved them, but he did not understand them all. He found out that they were ringing for weddings when he thought they were summoning the fire brigade—or what might go for a fire brigade—and he had never been able to class the funerals properly. He did not know whether weddings were more solemn occasions in Karmania than deaths, but he had not yet got the bell business listed.

On this day the church bell rang in a dancing Dervish fashion—madly, wildly—dashing, so Crossdale thought, its very head and lips against the stones of the little belfry. Then the lighter toned bell on the top of the Cyé inn—the Ritz-Carlton dinner bell, as Korvan and he called it—took

the excitement up, and tolled in a wonderfully staid fashion. Then the other bells, wherever they might be—from the donkeys' necks to the horses' collars—all chorused in, and the village was vocal. There were no other bells to hear, because the nearest town was Roda and not audible. But in the far distance Pratz-Zenoe, lost and mysterious to Crossdale, had taken it up.

He did not have to send for Serga to ask him what the excitement was, for the servant came running, making the most peculiar noise in his throat, a sort of bleat, a sort of cry. He threw himself down on his knees before Crossdale and rocked to and fro, with his hands covering his face.

"Now," thought the American, looking down at him, "what has broken loose? This is the revolution, sure thing!" And he wouldn't have been surprised to see the place surrounded by Zito and his fifty good men and true. But Serga lifted his face and wailed forth, in a tone a thousand fold more funereal than the peals of the bells:

"Los Res! Los Res!"

"Ah!" ejaculated Crossdale, with extreme solemnity in his voice. "That's the dope, is it? The poor old boy has passed his checks in at last!"

That was the way in which Crossdale learned that King Peter had gone to his last reward—or punishment, whatever it might chance to be—and according to a very old Karmanian law, in default of other heirs the Queen was the sole ruler of the State.

He had pinned a little calendar up on the wall of their hut and as November came in and advanced he wondered each day, tearing off the slips: "Will it be tomorrow?" About a

fortnight later he and Korvan were standing at the entrance to the tunnel, watching the passing of the mule carts loaded with tunnel refuse, driven by Karmanians in native dress, standing bare legs apart, red cap in hand, driving the mules with long leather-thonged whips. Suddenly the American looked up and saw a man coming toward them from the south: "Gad!" he said. "If that isn't old Beelzebub!"

Korvan laughed. "Is that what you call Ugo? Far too good for him—he's only a fool."

"Sorry," Crossdale started forward to meet the spy. "He'll be harder to deal with. You can corrupt a devil, but deliver me from a stupid man."

To Korvan he spoke no word of politics, and he had never mentioned the name of Refan Ugo. When the latter rode up, he threw himself off his horse, saluted stiffly. The three men exchanged greetings. Ugo took a letter from his pocket, sealed with myrtle-green seals, and handed it to Lieutenant Korvan. He threw his horse's reins over its back and the animal immediately stretched himself out and began to nose the sandy ground.

"I have ridden over from Pratz-Zenoe," said Ugo. As he gave Korvan the letter he touched his forehead with his hand and said softly: "*Heljen!*" and Crossdale knew that the letter was from the Queen.

Ugo was thinner and paler, but he met Crossdale's look with steadiness. The American slapped him on the back. "Well, Borgia! What's the latest prescription for poisons or torture for suspects? Willie, we have missed you. I've had a light in the window for you, Ugo, for the last six weeks."

But even to the engineer, who was suspicious of everything about him, Ugo seemed to have attained a new dignity. "Mr. Crossdale, I'm a royal messenger, but I'd have come in any case because I want to have a little talk with you."

"Sure," said Crossdale. "I didn't know till I saw you coming across the plains, Ugo, how much I wanted to see you. How is His Excellency, Prince Karol?"

"I haven't seen his Excellency—he arrived at Pratz-Zenoe after I had left. When can you see me?"

"Why," said the engineer easily, "any time, at the Ritz-Carlton. Perhaps you don't know that rendezvous, Ugo? There!" he said pointing. "About a hundred yards from the Moulin Rouge. That's what Lieutenant Korvan and I call the Cye hotel. That's our shebang over there, where the smoke's coming out of the chimney. Come in tomorrow at six."

Ugo smiled slightly. "Why, you may not be back, Mr. Crossdale."

The American wrinkled his eyebrows. "There!" he exclaimed, "now you're off, Ugo! True to life! Not back by six? What do you mean?"

Ugo put out his hand and drew his horse back from the rails. "The Queen," he said, "is coming to Cye to the hunting lodge, for a few days."

Here Korvan, who had finished his letter, put it in its envelope and thrust the envelope in the pocket of his coat. He linked his arm in Crossdale's and turned him away from Ugo, walking slowly toward the village. "Her Majesty is coming here,"

Crossdale lifted his eyebrows. "To the tunnel or the Ritz-Carlton?"

"To her own lodge. She wishes to come to Cyé and see the operations of the Royal State Railway."

Here, as he spoke, one of the laborers came running, carrying in his hand the red flag and crying in Karmanian to stand back, to stand back. He was followed by hurrying laborers, some of them naked to the waist, and they scattered in different directions.

Crossdale and Korvan and Refan Ugo stood together, watching for the low, soft thunderous explosion which followed shortly, seeming to tear apart the very entrails of Mount Nepta, and out of the tunnel's mouth billows of smoke rolled, white as snow, afterwards turning to pale ashen yellow. Crossdale went over to the foreman of the squad of workmen and remained for some time, talking and taking notes. Korvan followed slowly.

"It is a bit complicated," Korvan said, after a few moments. "Her Majesty will be here tomorrow at four."

"We'll blow up the tenth section for her," said Crossdale indifferently. "I've been waiting for royalty to do it. I'm going to the office now—come along, Korvan."

But Korvan put his hand on the other's arm. "The Queen wants her visit to be incognito. It's one of her caprices. She says you are to go over to the hunting lodge at four and have tea there, and meanwhile I am to show her everything there is to see."

Crossdale gave his full attention to his friend. "Gosh, Korvan," he said shortly, "what does she think I am? An English old maid who can't miss her tea? Tea at five

o'clock, according to her royal pleasure!" he laughed. "Well, I'll be damned!"

The other man was visibly embarrassed. "It's a whim of Karmen Mara's, but I'm afraid you'll have to go. It's a royal command."

The American put his hand inside his waistcoat to find a cigarette, and he touched his little leather case. And then it rushed over him: *Tea at the lodge at five o'clock! This was November! "Sometime in November!"* And his expression changed so suddenly that he was afraid to let his companion see the alteration.

As he lit his cigarette he capitulated weakly: "All right—if it's a royal command, I suppose it will have to be obeyed."

CHAPTER XXIV

AT THE QUEEN'S LODGE—"SOMETIME IN NOVEMBER"

Crossdale rode over from Cye, and it was past four when he stopped his horse before the Lodge. Lights glowed behind the red curtains. It gave him a strange feeling to realize that he was expected.

"Hello, Rip-Van-Winkle!" he said to the gray beard who opened the door. "What are the latest bulletins of battle, murder and sudden death? The God of the Harvests send you a mild winter!" which was the customary greeting to servants who carry wood for fires in Karmania.

The November dusk filled the long living room, lit by the fire only. The ancient took Crossdale's hat and gloves and the American went over to the fireplace, in front of which the table was spread for tea, with hissing samovar, green cups and saucers, plates of bread, butter and honey, and a bowl of yellow roses bright as butter amongst their green leaves.

Crossdale thought the feast suggestive. It seemed contrived on purpose that he should remember the cottage on the Savia side of the mountain and the dairy fare.

He was glowing with exercise, full of expectation. It was *November*. "*Sometime in November*." This was Cye; this was the Queen's lodge.

He started like a boy when the door opened to let in Griffen, the oldest of the three hounds, who came bounding to Crossdale, and the two were standing before the fire when the door opened a second time to let in a lady. Back of her a servant carried two lighted candelabra.

Crossdale heard her say: "So sorry to have kept you waiting," and she came in, charmingly, with great friendliness, and holding out her hand as though they were old friends.

"I didn't mind waiting in the least—I had a friend to keep me company." His hand was on the dog's head. She sat before the tea table and the light of the fire fell redly over her, as the noon sun had shone on her in the forest hut. She began to make the tea. She wore a short, thick walking skirt, brown like the leaves, and a mannish little silk shirt with a smart cravat and mannish cuff links; but around her neck fell a long chain of small pearls caught in at the belt of her dress. Otherwise she was severe, boyish. All over her head grew the close curling hair, crisp and dark.

"The work on the road is going splendidly, we hear, isn't it, Mr. Crossdale? I want to see the mining of a section from start to finish. I will come some day," she said with spirit, "surely." And then, as though she envied her sister, she continued: "I *wonder* what Korvan is showing the Queen?"

"Nothing much," said the engineer indifferently. "Waste cars—hundreds of them a day—dragging out the very heart of poor old Nepta! The natives work like ants."

He took his place by the fire, standing near her with his hands behind his back, looking down. He felt deliciously at

ease and thought how jolly it would be to have tea with her, breakfast, lunch and dinner three hundred and sixty-five days out of the year!

As she sat in the green-covered chair, before the shining table, with its beautiful things, the light of the fire warm on her white blouse, her hands and hair and cheek, he said: "I waited for the Queen's visit to the railroad with great calm. Royalty means nothing to Americans! You should see our democratic country, from east to west, with everybody equal. The cook—when you get her—comes in her own machine to do her work, and she feels herself such a little queen. The spirit of equality runs through the country."

"It is rather entertaining," she returned. "But for hundreds of years we have been royalties, we are part of this system."

Crossdale said in a matter-of-fact voice: "But you ought not to be a monarchist! You're a real woman, too real to bother with all this picture-book sort of thing!" She stared at him in frankest astonishment, pushed her chair back and made a little exclamation at his daring.

"You come from the people yourself, don't you, Princess?" She did not reply to this directly, as though she thought it were taking a great liberty. But she said: "John Sarvanarof thought as you do," and was silent, turning her head from him, looking into the fire, for a few seconds.

He could enjoy to the full the picture she made—vivid, adorable, full of life and color, so near to him—and so far removed! He was thinking to himself: "Oh, it can't be possible that I have only seen her twice, that this is the second

time!" But he had back of him no traditions that should make him tremble before caste and high state.

"I am going to tell you something," he said, "that will amuse you very much indeed. Do you remember, when you were in England—a school girl, I should say—having your photograph taken in Dover Street?"

She turned slowly round to him. "Why do you ask me that?"

"Because—it's awfully curious, isn't it?—but I suppose you had a dozen or so taken, as one does, and out of that dozen a copy went over to the United States, and was put in a photographer's window in Boston, with a lot of other foreign swells."

She was listening to him, hanging on his words. Nothing so strange and so personal had ever happened to her. Of all the photographs which had been taken of her for years, none of them were on exhibition in the kingdom.

"One day I was going along in Boston and I saw that picture in the window, and I went in and bought it."

"You did? You bought it?"

Crossdale nodded. "I took it back with me to my rooms in the University. I put it up on my chimney piece, and it has stayed with me ever since. I have got it now, out on my ranch, in an old portfolio. It was a picture of you—that I know. But when I bought it I did not know there was such a person in the world as the Princess Mariska."

Here she put both hands over her face and shook with laughter. He heard her exclaim: "Princess Mariska! Oh, it's really too awfully funny! It's fortunate that you haven't that picture in Karmania, because all pictures of the royal

family are the private property of the court." Griffen was between them on the rug, his long gray body outstretched.

"You must not tell the Queen what a rank democrat I am," he said, "or she might think that I was a suspicious character. I am really nothing but a tunnel builder and a road maker, and I have nothing to do with the politics of any country."

"It is always well to know what one's guests think, and you have been wonderfully frank."

She moved away from the tea table. He could not take his eyes from her. Her brown skirt was very short above her ankles, in their brown stockings and shoes; it was the dress of a woman used to out-of-door sports and life, and she walked with a freedom, with a subtleness, with a lightness that was a pleasure to observe. Griffen followed her and she wound her hand in his collar, as she had wound it in the chain around her neck.

Again there came to him the same feeling that he had had up on the mountain on the Savian side. When he knew that he must leave her, when he should go out of here, there would be nothing left but a problematic time when he might see her again.

"As I passed through here in September, this note was given me the first night I spent in Las Restaurus. I have carried it round with me ever since, and it's taken nearly three months to find a means to pass it on. Now, will you see that Her Majesty gets this letter?" and he handed her the letter enclosed to the Queen in his communication from

John Sarvanarof, brought him by the native Creta in the heart of the night.

She took it, turned it over, looking at the seal with an expression of surprise.

"Mr. Crossdale—this is extraordinary—I don't know if I should take it like this—"

"Oh, yes, you do," he said quietly. "I don't believe *you* are under the thumb of the Prime Minister. I couldn't believe it of you—you've got too much spirit; you're too much of a sport, too much of a woman. There's no dynamite in it," with a little smile and dropping his voice. "I dare say it's a love letter." And he saw her blush royally then.

Across her mobile face astonishment, interest and amusement passed. Crossdale was so naive and so boyish, so perfectly frank, so absolutely full of good faith, so devoid of convention and formality. He was charming her. She slipped the letter in the pocket of her brown woolen skirt and buttoned the button over it. And Crossdale returned to his own affairs.

"I found the note you left on the sill of the little doll's house. That's why I came here today, not to obey a royal command in the least—just to see you." Her face broke into smiles, and she bit her lip again as he had seen her do when she was cutting the bread in the dairy.

"You did go back then?"

"Of course—next day—and I was never so disappointed in all my life as when I found the blinds drawn and the place deserted."

She liked the way he stood. He hardly moved. There

was a strength and repose about his figure; he was as well set-up as a healthy, vigorous man should be. She liked the set of his clothes, the way he wore them; his broad shoulders and deep chest and his sleek, dark head. Best of all she liked the intent and earnest expression of his face, his simplicity, reality.

She walked toward the deep cedar door, without which was the darkening autumn night. Outside he could hear his horse. Unable to keep the words back that threatened to make him indiscreet and perhaps spoil his chances, he asked:

"Why did you ask me to come here today?"

She stopped, the dog by her side. "I wanted some one to tell *me* about the road, too."

"Why did you leave that note on the window ledge?"

She did not seem in the least afraid to meet his eyes with her own, and all around the corners of them, close to her long black lashes, were little crinkles of amusement. "Just as you put crumbs, to see if they will be gone in the morning."

"You wanted me to find the path again; you wanted me to return. Why?"

She raised her hand. "Listen!" And she came a little toward him, Griffen following her. "The Queen's minstrels—listen!"

A little group of Karmanian singers had come up on the porch and they began to tune their crude instruments.

"They have come to sing to the Queen some of her songs."

She drew back, Griffen beside her, away from the door. Crossdale could see the grouping of the musicians in their native dress on the porch. They began to sing the song he knew so well:

"What shall be given
To him who comes riding
Over the mountains and through the forests
To our hill city?"

They stood together like this in the candlelight and firelight while the musicians sang. Then she stirred. Crossdale put out his hand. "Good-bye. Good-night." The musicians tuned and scraped and began the second song of the series of love songs that had made Karmen Mara famous.

When she spoke again her voice was quite matter-of-fact. "I will send you a message tomorrow by Refan Ugo, to ask you when I can come and see the operations."

"By that old chameleon?"

She seemed amused. "That describes him exactly. He does change, but now he wears the green of the Queen's servants."

As she remained standing, waiting for him to go, he had nothing to do but to follow her suggestion, because, curiously, there seemed to fall between them, as there had before, a sudden coldness, a sense of distance. He felt as far from her in that moment as he had felt near a little while before, and from the opposite side of the room, without being announced, the footman who had entered with the candelabra, began to remove the tea things.

The American bowed, and without attempting to touch her hand again, went out, past the group of native musicians.

CHAPTER XXV

A WOMAN IN LOVE FEARS DANGER FOR HER LOVER,
WHEREAS HIS GREATEST DANGER IS HERSELF
(KARMANIAN PROVERB)

The Queen went hunting nearly every day with her suite and in those forests which he had now no time to explore Crossdale heard the sound of the horn and the cry of the hounds. The charm of the visit to the lodge thrilled him and there was about his feeling for her an unrest and yet a great content. He had a belief in things; he believed that what was for him was coming his way and nothing on earth could stop it. Walking home he slipped back out of sight to watch, for he heard the hounds in full cry—magic sound that no sportsman can hear indifferently.

The Queen's hunt broke from the edge of the woods, took the field between the high road of Cye and the entrance of the forest in the direction of the lodge. Over peasant lands and brown fields he saw them rush by him—dogs, horses, the men in regulation pink coats, white trousers, high boots, conventional and out of keeping with barbaric Karmania. After them, on a perfect hunter, which looked to be English, he saw not the Queen, but the woman of the yellow rose, and alone. He waited to see the Queen, but saw no one but this charming woman, who flashed by in perfect form and took the ditch like a bird across the first meadow. She disappeared in the mist.

"She's only the sister of the Queen," he thought to himself, with a certain irritation, "and herself from simple people. Why don't I write a letter and ask her to let me see her? Why shouldn't I?"

He walked slowly home, thinking of her, and was getting to work when he heard the sound of voices outside and the baying of dogs, a blast from the horn, and some one rapped sharply on the door as though with the butt of a whip.

He opened the door and she stood there, in scarlet coat, stiff collar, little low hat, riding breeches and high boots, gloves and whip in her hands. Back of her were huntsmen and dogs, but they fell behind as she entered the hut and Crossdale shut the door.

She was very grave. Indeed, there had always been two atmospheres between them: one of comradeship and sweetness, of remarkable understanding, the atmosphere between two mates; then a wall, an immeasurable distance, as though he were a North Pole man and she a South Pole woman, with the equator and continents between.

"Did the fox run in here, Mr. Crossdale?"

Crossdale caught his breath and was equal to the situation.

"If you mean Captain Ugo, Princess, yes. A fortnight ago." And then he grew all warm and exultant. *The fox!* She had wanted to come and see him—she was keeping her promise—this was her excuse. Before the unlit peat fire was a peasant chair, garnished with bright-colored calico, and a low black bench.

"This is my drawing room and my state apartment. Will you have the box or the chair?"

She smiled, yet hardly could he call it a smile. She was looking at him profoundly, out of the grayest of gray eyes, flecked with brown. She kept her gloves and whip and held them in her strong, capable, ringless hands. As she took the chair and Crossdale perched on the box, he said:

"I won't really give you the choice between the box and the chair because the chair is uncertain. It is in Korvan's place—he is lighter weight than I am."

"Oh!" she exclaimed and started to rise, as though she did not care at all to find herself suddenly on the stone floor.

"It will hold *you*," said Crossdale. "You're a feather-weight for a tall woman."

"I'm the Queen's messenger," she said.

The American bowed. And he saw that she was not to him as she had been, although she was charming. "*Heljen!*" he murmured softly, and she inclined her head.

"You gave me a letter for the Queen."

"One that had been entrusted to me."

"We find it singular that a stranger—a guest—"

Crossdale interrupted. "I couldn't call myself a guest in this kingdom!"

"You have not been given true hospitality in the Kingdom?"

"Well, I have been watched like a miserable suspect ever since I entered, to tell the truth, and until I beat up the chap who had been set upon me to dog my steps, until I had thrashed him within an inch of his life, I don't think I stood a chance."

He saw her great surprise; she flushed, and he continued: "Refan Ugo is not likely to boast about his beating."

"Refan Ugo? I think you misjudge him, Mr. Crossdale. Honestly, I don't believe you have a truer friend in the kingdom, from what I have heard the Prime Minister say to the Queen." But then she tossed her head back in a way she had, as though to shake away something she did not care to discuss: "To return to the letter—"

"Yes." He accepted to go back to that.

She looked a little troubled, finding it hard to put her questions. Then she asked abruptly: "Do you know what that letter contained?" looking him fully in the eyes.

"I have not the slightest idea."

It was always a hard thing for him when he was with her to think of her in any way but as the woman with whom he had fallen in love and whom he wanted to court and to win. Everything else seemed such an awful waste of time between them, when time was short and fate was cruel. What a wonder she was! What a chin! What a mould of the lips! What flexible strong hands! How full of character and race she was!

It amused him to see that she was studying him, too, in her woman's way, trying to read him. She wound her gloves round and round in a tight chamois ball, and sitting up very straight on the box, she began to put him through a sort of catechism. "Do you know, I believe that I will tell you the substance of that letter?"

"Well," said Crossdale, "that is for you to decide. I don't know whether you had better do so or not. What can I say? After all, what can it possibly have to do with me and my work in Karmania?"

She did not hear a word he said. She seemed to be mus-

ing. "It is colossal!" she exclaimed. "Extraordinary! And the man who wrote it deserves all that will come to him later—some day he will meet his nemesis. He will surely be murdered by some one—it is in his palm, you know—years ago it was foretold him here in the kingdom that he would meet with a violent death."

Crossdale said: "He is a striking figure—there is no doubt about that; very dramatic, and I dare say tragic, too. Ambitious people who sacrifice everything to their ends usually end up in a tragic fashion, don't you think?"

She probably heard him, as she was tremendously interested in him altogether, but she gave no sign, and with her little whip drew on the tiles of the rough peasant hearth imaginary lines. Crossdale thought: "If every one of those lines were the obstacles between us, Princess, they would not be half enough! How great they are! Shall I ever be able to overcome them?"

"In writing to Her Majesty he says in sum a great deal that he used to say to her when he was in office in Karmania. He used then to spend hours trying to win her over to his ideas of democracy; he asked her then to abdicate, to proclaim the kingdom a republic." She raised her eyes to Crossdale's.

But the Kingdom of Karmania—its politics, its rebellions, its seditions—were insignificant in comparison with the fact that there she sat, desirable and dear, alone with him in this little room, and that he loved her. This was so much more important that what she saw in his face made her color and look away, down at the hearthstone, where nothing had transfixed her imaginary lines.

"He cries democracy to the skies," she went on. "He has written out a long speech for freedom." She shrugged. "Again he asks the Queen to give up her kingdom, to proclaim him president."

Here Crossdale exclaimed: "I never heard such sublime arrogance! Why, he's quite superb, isn't he?"

"The most extraordinary has yet to come," said Crossdale's visitor. "He says that she must marry him and rule the republic with her husband." Now she looked at him again, but Crossdale took this very peacefully. Indeed, with whom the Queen of Karmania ruled was little to him.

"Ambitious to the last degree, isn't he? When I first came here I was told by many people what a great lover John Sarvanarof was, and that he had loved the Queen for years. It can't be any news to you, of course—all court gossip must be known to you." But she sat up sharply. Evidently he had startled her.

"On the contrary," she said, "I did not know that—at least, I mean I had no idea it was such common talk. We are kept hideously protected at the court. So that is what they say, do they?" Her tone was cold, disdainful, her face pale as she met his eyes. "Well I can tell you, Mr. Crossdale, with authority, that the Queen would rather die than accept his proposition." Then she broke in upon her anger, for she was angry and showed it, and said: "But there is still more of this letter. He advises the Queen to make an ally of you, Mr. Crossdale, to enlist you in our cause, as he calls it."

He interrupted her: "It isn't possible that he should dare to speak my name in that way to the Queen? Before God,

I want to tell her that I have no remote interest in Prince John and his revolution! What can I say—?”

She remained some few moments looking at him quietly, thoughtfully, then a charming smile broke over her face.

“You need not say anything at all. I dare say I am very foolish and very easily persuaded, but I believe you.”

Under her spell Crossdale said daringly: “You’re too real a woman, too wonderful a woman, to have any part at all in this picture book life.”

“Why, how do you mean?” She flushed crimson.

“You ought to be living a real existence in an up-to-date country, making a man happy and bringing up sons and daughters on democratic lines! If I have shocked you I am sorry,” he continued. “It’s because you seem such a real woman to me,” and he laughed a little softly, “and I feel such a real man.” He got up and took a match off the little ledge that ran around the wall and stooped down and lit the peat fire. “It gets so beastly cold here in about five seconds that you’ll feel it.” And he crouched there over his fire as it formed and took, and she watched him.

“When you speak of real things,” she said slowly, “you think of your country, of your people.”

“Of course.”

“Our country and our people seem just as real to us.”

He was very near her. From where he half kneeled at the fire he looked up at her.

“If they are, if they do, that’s all right. To me the whole thing here seems like a dream, a Christmas pantomime. The only thing in it that is real is you.”

She was looking at him, directly, with her great gray

eyes. He had to use all his control to keep from seizing her hands with the gloves and whip in them, covering them with kisses, putting his head down on her knees. He rose, went back to his seat, but her glance followed him.

"If the Prime Minister knew of this letter—"

"He'd treat me as he did Baumgarten."

"Baumgarten committed suicide."

"So he did—I forgot." His tone was unmistakable. She let it pass and rose slowly.

"Oh, don't move!" he pleaded. "If you knew what it is to see a woman in this room!" But she moved slowly from before the hot fire, drawing her gloves through her hands.

"You must be very, very careful in Karmania, Mr. Crossdale."

He laughed. "Extremely careful with dynamite, for instance. If I wasn't, the Queen would have a few hundred subjects less! These chaps here treat dynamite as though it were loaf sugar. If you mean—if you mean I must be careful in the way I want to see you, the way I would like to know you better and to—"

"Please! Please! The country is full of enemies to the crown. There is sedition at our doors."

"You might say, there are brave men fighting for their ideals, Princess."

She said slowly: "If the Prime Minister should think that you were one of those brave men, fighting for those ideals—"

She was passing close to him and he might not even touch the hand that held the whip and gloves! Dear as she was,

lovely as she was, growing to him more and more adorable and desirable every moment, between them there was that wall, that distance. There was the equator indeed, but she was the North Pole woman and he was the South Pole man.

"You came to warn me, Princess? It was kind—"

"I came to see what you knew about the letter."

"You believe that I knew nothing of its contents?"

"I believe what you tell me."

He drew in his breath with delight. She trusted him! That was a great step between them. "You are too good for words!" he cried warmly. "I am telling you God's truth—I am innocent of plot or intrigue. I never saw Prince John in my life until I met him on the Danube boat."

She asked him to open the door and as he did so there rushed in the gust-like mist of the November fog that rises in the mountain towns and invests the plains before sunset. Two or three horsemen waited without. Her visit as messenger from the Queen to the civil engineer was thoroughly chaperoned by men and dogs!

"In my own country—in my democratic country where everything is real and simple, I could ask to see you. But because you are at the court and the sister of the Queen I am as far away from you as though I were an outcast!"

"How ridiculous!" She put her hand out in decided leave-taking. "Good-night."

"Princess Mariska, when may I see you again?" He helped her mount and as she looked down at him from her horse, he returned her look steadily: "I must either see you again, and soon, and many, many times, or never again."

She did not answer. She gathered up her reins, touched her horse and rode away.

But he did not regret. "She must know! What confidence in me she has!" he mused. "What trust! How adorable she is, how wonderful! Fancy her coming here like that, with all that confidence, to warn me!" And he repeated: "But she must know!"

CHAPTER XXVI

KORVAN RECEIVES A SINISTER INVITATION TO PASS A WEEK-END WITH THE PRIME MINISTER

Crossdale had come from an interview with Ugo, who had done his best to impress Crossdale favorably, and he had been again the agreeable fellow the American had found him to be in Tamaresk. He had asked the engineer to outline the progress of the operations on the Royal State Railroad for the Prime Minister; he had discussed with him Monsieur O'Dell, third in authority, an able engineer.

"Both her Majesty and the Prime Minister wish me to express to you their satisfaction with the progress of the Royal State Railroad. When we parted in the tower in September, I told you that there was nothing against you in our books. That's the way things stand tonight. You have got a clean bill."

Crossdale pondered. "He's probably going to slip the handcuffs on me tomorrow."

As the two men walked along together toward the "Silver Horn" the spy said in parting: "Do you know what your man Jeff is doing in Roda?"

"What I instructed him to do," said the engineer, on the alert. "He is paymaster for about fifty men. What's wrong?"

"Be sure you keep in touch with him."

"Come," said Crossdale annoyed, "out with it! You know I don't like mysteries and God knows I am surrounded by them! What's the matter with the wretched man?"

"When did you see him last?"

"Let me see—" said Crossdale, now alarmed. "About ten days ago. He was all right then." A smile came to his lips as he recalled Jeff.

"He is not in Roda now."

Crossdale stopped still in the road in the cold November moonlight and fixed his companion.

"Not in Roda?" And he continued: "By Jove, Ugo! If anything happens to that servant of mine you'll settle with the United States."

The Karmanian soothed him. "There is a big festival at Pratz-Zenoe, a native affair—a bazaar and a circus—I dare say your man is among the pleasure seekers."

"Of course he is," said Crossdale, genuinely relieved. "He is all negro and would risk his life to see a circus. Keep your eye on him, Ugo. Give me his news!"

Ugo promised.

Korvan and Crossdale had dubbed the tap room of the "Silver Horn": "The Moulin Rouge" because of the spirited singing and dancing which went on in the little cafe morning, noon and night. The "Silver Horn" was a great distraction for both of the young men. It amused the American to watch the dancing and the beautiful dark-eyed women of the town, his workmen and the overseers—all came in and "whirra'ed."

Korvan was absorbed—not the same man who had come to Cye in the first days of October. For a fortnight the

American had seen very little of him, and almost all the work had fallen on Crossdale.

From a table in the corner near the bar he watched Korvan now, the center of a little group of men at the other end of the room, partly concealed by smoke from bad cigars and pipes. The landlady was absent from the bar, leaving in her place a brown-eyed lad of some twelve summers to mix the native drinks while she languorously "whirra'ed" with a majestic Karmanian.

Crossdale saw Korvan put his arm familiarly through the arm of their second overseer, a chap in charge of the dynamiting. Stephen was used to Karmanian demonstration, but he disliked his colleague's intimacy with his work people.

He had come in without being remarked. He finished what the "Silver Horn" called black coffee—black enough looking in all truth, and tasting like heavily sweetened liquorice. It had the advantage of not being easily forgotten; the taste of it remained in the mouth for the evening.

"Come here, Ganymede!" Crossdale said in English to the dark eyed Karmanian child, who was handing out by the pailful a special cordial tremendously popular with the patrons of the tap room. As far as he had ever been able to find out everything swam in it but liquor. It was mild; like most of the things in the country, it was highly colored; it was harmless. The Karmanians worked, danced and sang on non-intoxicating beverages. "Ask Lieutenant Korvan to come here."

The boy, who had climbed out over his perch, nodded and fled. He extracted Korvan from the smoke and brought him over to Crossdale.

Stephen got up from behind the table. "I say, old chap, I'm going back to the barracks. I've got some special matters to talk over with you. Can you tear yourself away from these gunpowder plots and come home?"

Ostensibly consulting with his colleague over operations beyond Roda, he studied him. Korvan was nervous, absorbed. Their little oil lamp, swaying in the most uncomfortable fashion, whilst the flaring charcoal threw its long shadows on the wooden ceiling and the stone floor, Crossdale broke the silence: "Korvan, I am going back to Savia next week."

The other readjusted his monocle. He did not seem to take in what his companion had told him.

"Come, old chap—is it love or politics? What the deuce is the matter with you, Korvan? If it's intrigue, I don't want to hear about it, but if it's a love affair, that's another matter."

Here Korvan, who was drawing with a blue pencil some geometrical figures on a piece of paper, sat up and raised his hand, breathlessly listening. From without came the sound of guitar strings lightly touched, a man's voice singing a verse of Karmen Mara's latest song.

Korvan, perfectly motionless and pale as death, listened, and in another moment he had gone to the door and opened it noiselessly, and when he shut it he shut within the hut a minstrel—a tall youth, his scarlet tunic belted with coarse leather belt, his blue trousers stuffed in his muddy boots, a scarf around his neck hiding mouth and chin, the fur cap pulled down, concealing the brown face, as dark as an Indian's.

He held out his guitar, stretching wide his arms, and the next minute had thrown his arms round Korvan in a brotherly embrace. He dashed off his hat, unwound his scarf, tossing them on the table and cried to Crossdale in a low, vibrating voice: "Hello! Glad to see you!"

Korvan had changed. In every move of his body, in every line of his face, he was alert, breathless, pale as death. He seized Sarvan by the arm. "You're mad!" he cried. "Mad, my God! Nothing can save you now!"

But Sarvan, cool and laughing, stood his guitar in a corner, took the peasant armchair and stretched out his legs with a sigh of content. "Gad, *mes amis*, I'm as hungry as a bear. How good it feels to sit down!"

"You've got cool nerve, Prince Sarvan," said Crossdale. "Your disguise is great! The Prime Minister wouldn't know you."

Korvan had taken from the little hanging cupboard near the fire a jug, into which he poured the contents of a brown bottle of ale; he cut off a piece of bread, put a big piece of cheese on it, and Sarvan, turning his chair to the table, littered with engineering stuff, ate like a famished man.

"Your Highness," Korvan spoke in earnest, tense tones, "what in God's name shall we do with you? You're not safe here an hour—not fifteen minutes."

The young man, who was pelting down the food, looked brightly from one face to another, although his eyes were heavy with fatigue. "Let me stretch out on a bed a few minutes, then I'll be off." There was a fire about him that appealed to Crossdale mightily.

"I wouldn't get Crossdale into trouble," said the Prince,

knitting his brows, "for anything on earth. I should not stay here an hour."

"Your Highness," said the engineer, "I don't mix in your politics, but I'll be damned if I don't give you my bed. And you two want to talk—I'll go into the royal apartments and leave you alone."

"No," Korvan put his hand on his arm. "Don't leave us, old man. A moment ago you said: 'Is it love or politics?' I'm not a royalist; I am a democrat, a republican, a follower of Prince John. I have been meaning to tell you for a long time."

The Prince walked heavily toward the door of the little chamber off the living room. "I bear a charmed life, Crossdale. I have been all up and down here for the last month. I have been in the squad of workmen—you engaged me the other day with the new lot! I was in the tunnel when you put a fuse—standing within fifty feet of you. Just let me have the feel of a bed again—"

He staggered and leaned on Korvan, but he had not time to cross the threshold when there came a clear rap at the door. In a second Korvan had pushed him, Crossdale threw in his scarf and cap after him, and the Karmanian had scarcely shut the door when Crossdale opened the other to admit Refan Ugo.

The spy, looking with apparent indifference and unremarking politeness from one to the other of the young men, tranquilly bade them good evening. "Sorry to make such a late call, but I have received a royal message which I was obliged to bring in person."

Korvan invited him in with the utmost cordiality. Cross-

dale had a horrible conviction that something of Prince Sarvan's had been left for the spy to see, but he did not dare to glance around. The little room seemed to dwindle to the men's figures, but Refan Ugo's in his dark cloak, cold and impassive, seemed the most effective of them all.

"I won't sit down. My message is for Lieutenant Korvan," and he fixed Stanislas with undisguised satisfaction. "His Excellency, the Prime Minister, has asked me to extend you an invitation, Lieutenant Korvan—"

"His Excellency is very kind," murmured Korvan.

Crossdale understood that the same thrust which had been dealt to Refan Ugo in the Queen's lodge, and which had put Stanislas Korvan in his place, was to be dealt now to his colleague.

"You are to be the guest of his Excellency for several days at Pratz-Zenoe. I will accompany you myself tomorrow, Lieutenant Korvan."

Crossdale saw the blow tell, as Korvan struggled for self-control. He said, looking at the American: "Crossdale can hardly spare me—we have pressing work on the Royal State Railway."

Ugo, who had not advanced more than a few feet from the door, now put his hand back on the latch, as though he contemplated immediately retiring. "Lieutenant Korvan, if you remember, I was at one time *First Secretary*. Now I carry messages from Her Majesty to her subjects."

"Gad!" thought Crossdale. "How I'd like to smash his face for him again!" But he remained silent, quietly smoking. "I will deal with you later—God give me long enough life to wipe up a few feet of ground with you!" He

flicked the ashes of his cigarette into the fire, listening for some sound from the room beyond.

"You will be ready to ride with me to Pratz-Zenoe tomorrow at ten, Lieutenant Korvan—Good-night. Good-night, Mr. Crossdale."

When he had gone and the door was locked behind him Korvan flew to the bedroom, looked in and came back to his friend, his face working. "He is sleeping, Crossdale, like a boy at school."

There was a silence for a minute between the two men and then Korvan seized the American by the hand and gripped it, wrung it. "Old sport!" he said. "The jig is up with me!"

"You mistrust this invitation to Pratz-Zenoe?"

The Karmanian could not conceal his agitation. He passed his hand across his mouth to steady it. "Prince Karol would never have sent for me if he hadn't suspected me. It is an arrest." He leaned against the table and began to catch at control. "He's got his claws on me lately, Crossdale. I have done the devil of a propaganda here! There isn't a workman between Roda and Mount Nepta who isn't ours. Karmania is rustling like wind in dry wheat. They may get *me*, but they can't get the Chief. Sarvan Sarvanarof is a wonder, Prince John is a wonder! We only wait our time." He turned with passion to his companion. "Crossdale, you won't dabble in the politics of our country, but you serve. Push the road, rush the work—"

Crossdale burst in upon him with a laugh, full of humor. "Old top! How long do you think they'll leave me on my job? I'm next—sure thing now."

"No," said Korvan confidentially. "You're not a suspect. We have got to get Sarvan out of here at once."

"Ah!" cried Crossdale, "it's too late!" Taking Korvan by the cuff of his coat, he pointed with his other hand toward their little window. "See those lights? They are lanterns four of them! They are coming here."

With his words came a loud blow on the door and the summons in Karmanian: "*Heljen!* Open in the name of the Queen!"

Four men entered in the dress of the Queen's Guard, and if the little room had seemed insignificant and the merest scenic background before, it was more than ever so now.

He heard Korvan deny the presence of the Prince. The men looked at each other and then at Crossdale. Korvan said in English: "No one has been here tonight but the Queen's messenger, Refan Ugo."

Crossdale nodded serenely, his hands in his pockets, and he looked from one to another of the men, whose faces were so serious, whose costume was so brilliant and theatrical.

"Home and mother, the United States and San Francisco, seem very far away, Korvan, but I think I can lie as well as the next one when it comes to it!"

He made an impressive negative gesture to the Chief of Police and his men. Crossdale was practical and categorical, and the men appeared to believe him. He was extremely popular in the province of Cye.

He smiled at the Chief. "There's not a soul in the house but ourselves! You can search from the turret to the dungeon." And nodding and smiling agreeably, he withdrew as an American citizen and a foreigner from the

intrigues of Central Europe went back to the bench, sat down on it and prepared to fill his pipe. But he was keyed up to the highest pitch.

The Chief of Police conveyed to Korvan the information that it was his duty as an effective Guard of the Queen to search the hut, and Crossdale, calling upon the good luck that follows heroes to protect them now, caressed the bowl of his pipe and stared at Sarvan's guitar over in the corner.

The Chief of Police opened the door into the bedroom and went in, followed by his men. There was a silence, a few Karmanian gutterals from the bedroom, and the search party returned, affable, beaming, laughing and apologetic.

From their quiet re-entrance the two men understood that the room was empty and that the young man, whom Korvan had seen twenty minutes before sleeping on his face like a boy at school, had been able to effect his escape.

CHAPTER XXVII

ONLY THE CONFIDENT AND THE DESPAIRING KNOW HOW
TO WAIT. (KARMANIAN PROVERB.)

The following day was superb, one of the bright mid-November days that in this southern valley glowed as warm as midsummer. In the distance, sapphire blue, rose the little range at the foot of which nestled the spa of Pratz-Zenoe, only to be reached by special passport from the Queen, and between Cye and Pratz-Zenoe rolled the colorful steppes. Toward this destination Crossdale saw Korvan ride off under escort. It had been a very strange affair altogether—Korvan's "invitation" and his departure. Neither of the two friends showed any unrest or uneasiness, although Korvan was desperate and Crossdale had a pretty good idea of what a royal invitation in this sense might mean. Captain Ugo was not visible. All night long a guard had spent the hours between Ugo's disappearance and the dawn astride of a chair, smoking filthy tobacco, in their cosy little study. Korvan and he had not been able to exchange an intimate word further than this: Korvan put a letter in a blank envelope and sealed in the American's hand, and in English said:

"If I never come back, old chap, see this letter finds its way to the proper person. Open it and you will discover who the person is." This was the second time that Crossdale had been made a messenger in this kingdom, and he

hoped to heaven he would never have to carry out this mission.

After Korvan's departure he did not know what to do with himself, and for the first time felt most desperately lonely and out of sorts with Karmania in the general sense of the word. If men could be transported in twenty-four hours' time out of their environment in such a summary way, what could ensure his personal safety? The Queen! Only her favor.

He could not stay another moment in the little desolate house, from which his companion had been taken forcibly away. He shut his cabin door, turned the key in it, and went over to his railroad shacks, a twenty minutes' walk through a field path, across the high road, to the settlements of shanties and the barracks, where materials and machinery and engines and cars were grouped around the yawning mouth of Mount Nepta's tunnel.

He went whistling, keeping up a certain run of spirits. But his anxiety about Korvan's fate did not hold all his thoughts. They went to the Woman, with force and vigor, and he set them free. She absorbed him, and the tremendous swing of his feelings and the relief that it was to think of her, even although he had no good reason for hope, proved how sincere his passion was. His mind was full of the images she created, the picture of her as he had seen her first, in her peasant dress, with that brilliant blue apron across her breast.

She seemed, oh, so often in his dreams, to laugh at him from the doorway of her dairy, hands on hips, the rose at her breast.

Then the lovely lady that she was in truth, behind the shining samovar, conventional, but none the less bewitching, fascinating, magnetic. Then the hunting girl, sitting in the little room of his brown hut, with the dark stained walls about her bright figure in the pink coat, and her brilliant, sparkling face lifted to him! Had she not been too splendid for words, coming like that, frankly, sincerely, putting his loyalty and his fidelity up to him?

Intrigues and state affairs might surround him; Karmania might be on the verge of revolution, but he could think of nothing as he thought of her. She hammered with the insistence of love at every part of his being. Decidedly it was because of her interest that his "press" was so good at court. Oh, if anxiety for his safety would only bring her back! Back into his little hut, he would never let her go again!

Crossdale came down through the sunlight to the works, and saw the one-track railroad shining away in the brilliant day towards Roda. He turned from field to high road—was within a few minutes of his little office near the mouth of the tunnel—and heard the drills, the voices of the workmen, and stopped to look at the busy scene. Smoke from the buildings rose limpid and translucent on the air. He was proud of his achievement. He could begin to see the finish of his enterprise.

Several people were standing without his little office—O'Dell—but the second overseer generally there was absent—a woman in English tweed walking dress, cape over her shoulders, stiff little cap on her head, crinkly chamois walking gloves and a walking stick, stood talking very seriously

with O'Dell, whose attitude was one of rigid attention. She seemed to command him, to give him orders, to insist, and he bowed in acceptance of whatever her commands might be.

The American hurried as fast as was compatible with dignity, and her face grew bright as he came up. She put out her hand in its crinkly glove. "Good morning. I have just been telling Mr. O'Dell that you are going to take me over the Royal State Railroad, aren't you—show me everything from start to finish?" She glanced at O'Dell with a meaning which Crossdale did not understand. "Show me everything that Lieutenant Korvan showed the Queen."

He was obliged to let her hand fall and in contained, commonplace words to tell her that he would be delighted. "I will take you," he said, "to the very core of Mount Nepta, as far in as the tunnel goes—why not? With a lantern on your cap and a torch at your side! And when we come out I will blow up a section in your honor, and you shall hear what the dynamite has to say to that ancient rock. In short," he finished, for something else to say, "you shall be served as royally as the Queen."

She blushed, and answered quickly: "Of course! But I am of the royal household, and you must not be surprised if they treat me with great deference as we go."

Whilst Crossdale gave his orders for the guides and for the cortege to take them in, O'Dell told him hurriedly in an undertone that the second overseer had been transported to Pratz-Zenoe in the same caravan with Korvan, an invitation from the authorities in the South.

That night he came back to his lonely cabin mad with hope and utterly happy. If a bomb had blown up the Royal State Railway works and carried his own cabin up into the air with it, he would probably have caught and held a star in his flight, and gone on with his dream.

He found his little fire lit and waiting, and a savory supper prepared by the faithful Serga, and, like two prehistoric creatures in the tiny room, his beloved dogs waited for him. He went into the bedroom, which he had shared with Korvan, took the hot tub which Serga had ready, shaved and made a complete and restful toilet, and came out refreshed, his senses singing and his brain active and keen, and withal in a state of wonderful vibration. He ate and sat down before his fire to smoke and to dream. He was alone with his dogs, with his memories of the long, perfect day. He forgot that Prince Sarvan had tossed dice for life and death here in this room the night before.

She had stayed with him all day. He had shown her all there was to be seen of the work on the Royal State Railroad. As he thought back he realized that everyone had stood aside to leave them alone. They treated her with deference, but he noticed nothing special and she had been cold, distant, reserved, showing in her glance and by her gesture her desire to be alone with her guide. His work became a real, an animate thing to him under her intelligence and enthusiasm. She insisted upon going to Roda with him from Cye on one of the small hand cars. It amused her to see it worked by the brake. She had the men of his staff dismissed definitely, and issued her commands as though indeed she were part of the royal household. Cross-

dale had found himself toward noon on a hand car with his guest, and a Karmanian workman in native costume driving them like mad down the single track to Roda. He had telephoned to keep the way free, and so they flew. And she was wild about it, delighted with it, and had not been satisfied until they had slowed and she had taken the Karmanian's place, and with Stephen's help she had driven the hand car the last half mile of the way. He could close his eyes and hear her laugh aloud as they drove, the wind in their faces, flying between the barren fields. He could feel her touch at his side and hear her voice: "Faster! It is great sport! Faster!"

Serga—noiseless, impassive, in his soft leather slippers—cleared away the remains of his master's supper, whilst Crossdale, with a dog on one side and another with his nose between his feet, relived the story of his perfect day.

But he was conscious that the servant waited in the most humble attitude of appeal, and he glanced up, impatient at any interruption of his thoughts. "Excellence," said the man in broken English, "does his Excellence think that Lieutenant Korvan will come back?"

He saw the man's eyes fill with moisture and he remembered his friend with a pang. "What a selfish hound I am!" He comforted Serga as well as he could and the man slipped out noiselessly, and Crossdale went back to his dream.

In the little inn at Roda, the same wayside station where he had stopped as he had caravanned in from Tamaresk, he had eaten a midday meal with her at a rough table with no cloth; with pewter plates and pewter mugs; and they drank country beer and ate bread and cheese and sausage; .

and he watched her, scarcely touching the food, carried away by her charm.

Everywhere they went the people eyed her curiously and disappeared as if by magic to leave them alone. And whilst they ate, the native musicians had played the Queen's songs. Reliving it he forgot everything else. He forgot that Jeff Robinson had been missing from Roda for three days and the fact that his own safety was not assured; he forgot Korvan. Everything was obliterated by this absorbing, passionate interest.

"Tell your man to drive you to the Prime Minister's rest-house in your *treja* tomorrow. Be there at one and then dismiss him."

She had said this to him before the "Silver Horn" at Cye, where he had left her, where she had met her own *treja* and the servants of the Queen's household. He could not have sat down to his table and have lost himself in computations and mathematics to have saved his soul. He picked up Sarvan's guitar, tuned it and began to touch the string, and he found the chords of Karmen Mara's song, which until now he had never played:

"What shall I give him
Who comes so far and so gladly?
A gift for a stranger,
A gift for a rider,
I will give him that which I have kept for him,
that which my mother gave me.
What is this gift? The heart in my breast.
When he feels it he will count its beating."

CHAPTER XXVIII

WHEN YOUR NEIGHBOR'S WIFE HAS HONEY AND FIRE ON
HER LIPS, A WISE MAN WAITS TILL HER HUSBAND GOES
ON A JOURNEY. (KARMANIAN PROVERB.)

Crossdale dismissed his *treja*. "*Skarervaro! Skarervaro batuchi!*" he said to the old peasant in the door of Karol's rest house. The old creature this time did not wield a pancake turner, but he might have been standing there, gazing at the forest for who should come and go ever since the fatal day of Paul's accident in September. *Skarervaro batuchi* means: "May you inherit money from your enemies and preserve as long as you live your teeth and your eyesight." After having made this friendly wish Crossdale saw how futile it was, for the old peasant had not a tooth in his head and he stared out of bleared eyes.

"I don't know whether he expects me," the American thought, "or whether he looks for anything but the end of the world, but here I am."

The bells died away. The wonderful autumn forests were around him, brown rabbits ran across the piney ground, the trees came up to the very door of the tiny hut. Here he stood, according to her expressed wish! It seemed too good to be true! He asked himself for the hundredth time: "What is it going to mean?"

Now *treja* bells, faint at first, then louder, clamoring, cry-

ing as they rang from the collars of her horses, smote him through with sound, and swinging out into the broad path before the hut, drawn by two stocky Cossack horses, a sledge jangled up before the rest house, and Crossdale saw that she was alone, except for Griffen by her side on the front seat. She was driving the stallions herself in great form, and as she drew up she waved her whip and Griffen sprang out and came rushing to him. He went to her and bent over her hand in its thick white glove.

"We'll put Griffen in the back seat," she said, "and then you will let me show you how the ponies take to the steppes! Come!"

And before he could realize his fortune he was by her side, Griffen half on the seat and half on the floor, making the best he could of his quarters; and she had whirled her black horses about and cracked her whip over their heads, calling to them in the rich voice she had when she spoke her native tongue: "*Mija! Mija!*" And the horses seemed to crouch for a spring and were off. The *treja* slid over the pine needles, and Crossdale saw that the bits of the stallions were cruel; otherwise she could never have managed them.

The day was warm with noon sunlight. She wore no furs, but a loose-fitting little coat of green with a high military collar and a little round black cap of astrachan close over her hair. From the back of her seat hung a coat lined with sable. She sat up trim and slim as a boy.

"I usually drive four horses." She had not once turned her face toward him, but he was drinking in every line of her body, the texture of her neck, the rich color under her cheek, the lines of her soft, red mouth, her beautiful fea-

tures, with the cheek bones too high for any race but that of the Slav.

They slipped and glided on, the horses' feet making scarcely any sound in the deep path. On either side of them rose the aisles of the pines and cedars with pink and purple trunks, until the eyes fairly ached following the vistas, broken, again carried on, the spaces found and lost.

"I love these forests," he murmured, "but I'd like to show you our lands—the prairies! I'd like you to see the way my own ranch looked the June night I left it to come out here."

"You left your land to come to Karmania. Tell me something about America."

He hesitated. What could he tell this child of an Oriental land about the western hemisphere? She could not understand its ideals or its dreams; she was a part of this old tapestry.

"It's a great land to be born in—the only place I'd want to be born in or come from. And yet—"

"You wouldn't want to live in Karmania always?"

He gave a little laugh. "Live in Karmania!"

They made a wide swinging sweep out from the forest and he saw the steppes again. She drew her horses up and pointed with her whip to the inland sea.

"It's not cattle country, but it's beautiful in its way."

It was like looking on a golden sea, in the full bright moonlight of an Indian summer, the mist shot through with gold. His companion stood up in the sledge, wound the reins around her wrists, put her right foot a bit forward and stood so, braced, turning her face for the first time fully to Crossdale, and he saw it in its brightness, in its witchery

and charm, flushed, gay, her gray eyes full of light and laughter.

"I am going to show you what my Cossack ponies can do!"

She called to them in her rich voice, and the horses sprang forward, dragging the *treja* after them into the golden mist of the steppe. With one bound Griffen leaped from the back of the sledge and he coursed and raced alongside, his long nose stretched forward, like a mad thing toward an unseen horizon.

The American braced himself. They went like mad, the girl's figure, in its loose tunic and its short skirt above the high leather Cossack boots, was fully displayed in her poise for balance. It was a sledge chariot race, a mad, mad race. At times they flew through fog, and then again it would blow back and the view be unbroken. She called to him: "Do you like it?" And he cried to her: "Great! Wonderful!" and saw that she could control her horses, understood them, and gave himself up to the fascination of the drive.

After a little she drew her stallions down, their bodies dripping and the foam clinging like cotton to their breasts and bellies. She drew them back on their haunches, according to the fashion of the country, like dogs, wound her reins around the whip and sank in her seat, drawing in long breaths of delight. Turning her brilliant face to him, suddenly she drew off her thick white gloves and dropped them on the floor of the *treja* and held out both her hands: "See!"

How they trembled! He seized them. He saw how fast she was breathing and that she had been whipped and

stimulated by the delight of the motion. Griffen had thrown himself down by the side of the *treja*, panting, exhausted, his tongue hanging out of his mouth. In another moment she had torn her hands away, sprung out of the *treja* and he followed her. She stood for a moment, then stretched out her arms as though she would embrace the sweep of the mysterious land, and as she shook her head back with a little eager gesture her small cap fell to the ground.

"Let it go! Let it go! I want to be free!"

He watched her as one might watch a fantasy, a dream. Since they had been driving, since their mad race, she had scarcely seemed a real thing to him. She seemed the essence of fire and feeling, but strangely apart. She glanced him over from head to foot. He was dressed in a country suit of tweeds, with knickerbockers and a soft cap, which, as hers had fallen to the ground, he tossed upon the seat of the sledge.

She nodded at him a challenge, a call to the youth of him: "Can you run? Do you like to run? Catch me, then!" And she had started to run across the steppes.

Running was one of the things he liked best in the way of sport, but he had to run well in order to keep pace with that flying bird. She scarcely seemed to touch the dust of the steppes with her slender feet in their soft black boots. He had never seen anything so vibrant, so magnetic as the lithe running figure he pursued.

She ran like a boy, but he caught her, holding her wrists in his pulsing palms. He saw the breath come short to her parted lips, her head up, though the color had not stayed

with her. She was his captive, with her small brilliant head high and her eyes half-defiant and half-demanding.

He kissed her once upon the lips, and then put his arms around her waist and held her, looking down at her. He had never looked so into any human face. And again he kissed her, standing close to her in that wide isolation. She did not return his caresses, but stood like a figure of stone. But the touch of her and the feel of her was human and marvellous and her lips seemed to have been made for him to drink. Then she tore herself from him and began to run back.

He hardly pursued her until she quieted down and fell into a walk, her hands loosely at her sides and her head bent forward. He let her go before him to the *treja*. He could not find words in any language to say what he wanted to say to her. She unwound her reins, picked up her cap and put it firmly on her head, found her soiled gloves, all marked with the reins, on the floor of the *treja*, and drew them on slowly, Crossdale watching her, dumb with passion. She got into the low sledge from her side, Griffen sprang behind them, and the American took the sable-lined cloak and wrapped it round her and held her closely to him. But he did not kiss her again, and still she was as though she were made of stone in his arms.

It had been one o'clock when they left the rest-house and it was only three now, and they drove back into the woods before the shadows found them.

"It will come—the parting—I shall have to leave her. Before we part I shall know what to say."

But although they drove in silence he felt the most perfect

harmony, the most complete and unbroken atmosphere. He had directed his *treja* to meet him at the rest-house at four. He was waiting for some sign from her before he could speak.

And it came. As they glided over the satin ground of the last alley, before the curve around which the rest-house became visible, the girl turned her face and he saw it, beautiful, grave, with eyes like stars. She leaned toward him, and he, with a low exclamation, put his arms about her as she drove and took from her then the kisses that she was ready to give. He knew that in all his life—until he should be, if he lived, an old, old man, there would never be another moment like this.

"I can never leave you!" he said, in a low voice, "Never!"

"You must. My people will meet me here in a few moments."

He put his hands over hers that held the reins, finding her slender wrists under the gauntlet of the thick white gloves.

"I can never find my way again unless you walk it with me—never!" And all of a sudden he was conscious that she caught her breath with a sob. She shook her head and tears sprang to her eyes, and now the color flooded her cheeks which had been so pale.

"Go!" she commanded him, stamping on the floor of the *treja* with her foot. "Go at once! Don't linger another moment. They must not see you with me here—go!"

From the distance came the long silver note of a hunting horn. She gathered up her reins and whip, and her low voice thrilled him through: "If you care for me as you seem to, trust me to find the way."

As he went, because he knew that she wished him to disappear before the others came, whoever they were, to find her and protect her, he could hear the ever nearing call of the hunting horn.

CHAPTER XXIX

ANY WOMAN MAY BECOME A QUEEN,
BUT A QUEEN MAY NOT ALWAYS BE A WOMAN
(KARMANIAN PROVERB)

Prince Karol was frightfully angry, but he was obliged to remain patiently attentive until the Queen had finished her song. He had come to see her as head of the kingdom and he knew that his diplomacy would be put to a severe test. With a guitar slung over her shoulder she stood singing with her musicians, at one end of the music room, trying one of her new songs.

He could not but acknowledge how changed for the better the young Queen was. She was more human, more enchanting; she seemed to have taken upon herself a new dignity, even with him. She was very different, this royal creatress and musician, from the wild girl of the *treja* ride and the race on the Steppes. She was absorbed in an art of which she was mistress. Her beauty and her fascination were at their best. But Prince Karol was not swayed by her in the least. She finished her song, put the guitar on the piano, dismissed the players, and the Premier came forward.

Under the long window overlooking the brown tower and Mount Nepta ran a deep seat, covered with brocade cushions in violet, old-rose-and-gold—priceless brocades brought from

the Orient in the days when the Crusaders came back from Jerusalem. The Queen sat down here, motioning her uncle to sit by her side, linked her hands around her knee, her white fingers bright against her black dress. She waited for the sermon which she knew was to come, and which she had determined to take in the worst possible grace.

On the way from his palace to the castle Karol had been wondering how to affect the Queen—capricious, wilful, every day gaining greater power with her Parliament and the people, as every day his own popularity waned. He could never treat her as a merely headstrong girl, as he wanted to do. She was adored from mountain to river; she had become the people's idol, and he was too wise not to know that without Karmen Mara for figure head, the ship of state would go on the rocks. He opened his campaign violently. Her quiet beauty irritated him. "Your Majesty, you have forgotten that you are a Queen."

Her long black dress, which clung close to her figure, was relieved at the neck by a heavy band of marvellous embroidery. She held her chin high; she wound her fingers in the long chain of pearls which she always wore, and instead of meeting her uncle's furious eyes, with maddening indifference she fixed her own on the portraits on the wall, a long row of portraits of the chiefs of the family of which she had become so arbitrarily a member. With a slight shrug and unruffled composure she answered: "I have forgotten that I am a Queen possibly because for the first time I have remembered that I am a woman."

The Premier laughed slightly. "There is no contingency possible to imagine, Karmen Mara, in which the woman at

the head of her kingdom has a right to forget her dignity and her people. Above all," he continued, "in this moment, when we need all our force to control circumstances. You will deflect from your power, you will tarnish your popularity; these sheep will cease to follow you, you will imperil the state."

"Oh," she said, with a toss of her charming head, "how well you speak! You should write a rhetoric, Uncle Karol! Your choice of words is so extraordinarily fit. The subject unfortunately does not warrant all this hyperbole!" Her cheeks reddened. From the crown of her dark head to the pointed toe of her black little slipper, with its gleaming buckle, she was truly royal this afternoon. An artist on the Rue de la Paix in Paris had created her gown for her. Two pearls hung from her ears, and from her neck to her waist the chain of black and white pearls, famous in the history of the crown jewels, relieved the austere simplicity of her dress.

"A woman," said her uncle, "always makes the excuse of her sex for her follies. Why should she not use it as a stimulant for her sacrifices, her renunciations and her duties?"

"Finer and finer!" exclaimed Karmen Mara. "You improve as you go on Uncle Karol! But your words are quite wasted—I know all that you wish to say, all that you would insinuate. I have been made the victim of fate, as far as I am concerned. I have had no legitimate life and no love, and I am only twenty-eight. I do not ask you to remember; I state the unimportant fact."

Karol saw that whatever his method had been, it was a poor one, that it would have no effect on her whatsoever.

Her voice was as cold and as hard as the mica that Crossdale was blowing out of his tunnel.

"But you shall hear me," he exclaimed, lifting his hand in a compelling gesture. "I speak for the people, for your husband's memory. You are making yourself the common talk of the country."

She sprang to her feet. "I command you to be still!" she exclaimed, and took a few steps away from him, her long arms behind her back, her head bent a little. Then she returned, standing in front of him, as a girl at school might have done, defending herself in some girlish escapade.

"Ridiculous! A mountain out of a mole hill! The perils of the kingdom are more interesting, they are vital! How can you speak of my poor amusements? I have seen a man, a gentleman, honorable, a few times—capriciously, I admit! Unconventional—yes! But there has been no harm in it. I might have eaten tea and toast with him here in the peacock room under your chaperonage—but it is dull, dull as all my life has been! I have been always incognito; Mr. Crossdale is an American and does not know who I am, anyway."

He smiled subtly. "My dear, you are not so naive as to think that this foreigner does not know with whom he has been flirting?"

"But I assure you he does not. He has thought from the first that I am Mariska."

"You are blind!" exclaimed the Prime Minister. "This masquerade has clouded your usual good sense! This engineer will boast of his adventure in his vulgar country to his vulgar countrymen. I wish I could stir your pride, your Majesty!"

But he only stirred her disgust and anger. "Talk to me of the political situation," she commanded. "Your point of view is too dull and hideous. Speak of other things." But her uncle saw that his insinuation had told.

"King Peter married you because of your dignity and your native nobility, Karmen Mara. Don't disappoint Karmania in the hour of her need. With Sarvanarof you were above reproach. You have been admirable in all your married history. You handled Prince Sarvan and his calf love like a true woman."

"And yet," she said bitterly, "you accuse me now in the most painful manner."

"Hitherto you have been equal to the situation."

"The situation at present is a different one, your Excellency." In saying this she quietly admitted to him that it was a situation. A rebellious expression darkened her face and in a very low tone she said: "I refuse to listen to anything, your Excellency, which would part me from my present interest. My marriage has debarred me from a happy life; why must I be denied a happy love?"

Karol saw that he would have to go to far greater lengths in order to effect any issue with her, and though his face grew stern he changed his tactics abruptly.

"Parliament meets tomorrow. I have many important matters to discuss with you other than this. Sarvanarof and Sarvan are at large. There is rebellion and treachery in your army, even among the Royal Guard. Ammunition has been concealed sufficient to arm a third of the population—that we know; but we have not discovered the hiding place. Now, although you were not born to the purple," he

thrust this at her, "try to meet these crises. Parliament convenes today; many things will come up for discussion."

But the Queen of Karmania, though God knows she loved her kingdom, had only clung, as a woman clings to something she does not like, to one sentence of his, and she returned to it, interrupting.

"What was your last horrid suggestion, Uncle Karol? What did you mean when you said that Mr. Crossdale would boast of his adventures in the United States?"

She fluttered into his hand like a bird and he was delighted. More humanly he said:

"I would have been glad not to have brought this into the question at all, my dear, but you force me to, and it may be well to do so." Reluctantly, as though he really wanted to spare her, he said: "You know that Refan Ugo confiscates Mr. Crossdale's correspondence?"

"Well?" she returned breathlessly. "I did not know it, in point of fact—I thought you had stopped that inquisition."

Karol put his hand in his pocket and brought out a letter addressed to: "Caleb Storm, Esq., Western Transportation Company, San Francisco." The envelope had been broken open, the seal tampered with. He handed the letter to the Queen.

She took it and read it with eyes that scarcely saw. It was hand written. She had never seen his handwriting; she had forgotten his signature on the documents. She read, and like a startled woman, suspicious always and jealous in love, for the moment she believed. In the midst of a business letter of no importance was a paragraph in which Mr.

Crossdale boasted of a sentimental adventure in Karmania with a lady whose rank was too high to name.

With trembling hands and flaming cheeks she folded the letter and crushed it in her hand. She did not give it back. "Oh!" she exclaimed. "He must leave the kingdom at once, at once!"

"Be a Queen, Karmen Mara. Be as brave in this as you have been in other moments of your life, my dear. I have thought the question out to the end."

Her eyes were fastened on him, scarcely seeing. He could not dream or imagine the anguish that this gave the proud and childlike woman, for she had trusted this man whom she loved with a singular and pure-minded belief, a faith which she could never give again, and which, in her primitive opinion, had sanctioned everything. She had not yet begun to take it in. She heard Karol say:

"We were able to rid ourselves of Baumgarten when he threatened to sell his workmen to the spies of Prince John. It is different with Crossdale. We only need to ship him out of the country as fast as possible."

"Oh," she exclaimed, "and the railroad?"

Here the Prime Minister shrugged slightly, looking down at his hands, which he was rubbing together, and said: "I think, your Majesty, that it will be the best thing for Karmania and for the royal cause to stop all operations on the Royal State Railway, to dismiss the working force, Crossdale with it, and to concentrate our efforts on the quelling of the rebellion."

But Queen Karmen Mara broke the spell under which she was. "On no account!" she said with much energy

and self-control. "As far as Mr. Crossdale is concerned, that we can handle without sacrificing the interests of the kingdom, and handle it we will, your Excellency. It is my express desire that nothing in the way of the railroad contracts shall be changed. I want the road for Karmania and I want the work to go on."

The Prime Minister did not press this. He was more than satisfied with the impression he had made, as he heard her murmur: "Oh, but it's inconceivable, unbelievable! It can't be true!"

He hurried: "Men are men, your Majesty, and Americans are fearfully vulgar! You don't know their type!"

But a shudder ran through her slender body. She put one hand over her eyes and said: "I feel as though all the dust of Karmania were on my face and lips—Mr. Crossdale must not leave the country until his work is done—and then—" she did not finish, but walked, humiliated, the length of the music room to her piano, and stood there leaning on it.

Prince Karol came over to her and put his hand on her shoulder. After a second she lifted her pale face to him, without a tear on her eyelids. What she said was very far from the sentimental subject of their conversation.

"Uncle Karol, I understand from Mariska, with whom I have walked the floor all night, that Stanislas is at Pratz-Zenoe. I have waited to speak to you about it. What will happen to him?"

"The worst, I am afraid. He is being tried by court-martial and will probably be condemned to death."

Karmen Mara clasped her hands together in protest.

"Impossible!" she exclaimed. "We cannot possibly allow it—it would kill my sister."

[The Prime Minister continued gravely: "The death of a traitor more or less will make small difference in the history of Karmania, your Majesty. Korvan will be shot before sunrise on Sunday morning."

"Never! Never! I will never sign such a sentence!"

"The Constitution has provided for that—since the last rebellion death warrants can be signed by the Prime Minister and Parliament."

"Over the signature of the Queen!"

"We must dispense with the signature of a mere woman in these times, Karmen Mara."

"Ah!" she exclaimed, fixing him with a strange look. "It would be easy for you, then, to put any man out of the way whom you detested, wouldn't it, your Excellency?"

"The best thing for you to do, my dear, would be to go to Roumania and remain there in quiet, until all these things have blown over. You would be spared disturbances and danger and these summary executions; you would be safe; and better than all, you will be able to escape the attentions of this traveling salesman."

"Heavens!" she exclaimed, withering him with one look of utter dislike. "What a brute you are! And you speak of vulgarity, Excellency!"

One of the Queen's valets stood at the far end of the music room, waiting for permission to enter. At a sign from the Queen he came forward with two visiting cards, which Prince Karol took from him. On his face a curious expression, half amusement, half of disgust.

"Mr. Stephen Crossdale!" he read from the card, glancing up at the Queen.

Karmen Mara looked speechlessly at the Prime Minister. "Where is this gentleman?"

It appeared that Mr. Crossdale was downstairs.

"I will go down at once and see him," said the Prime Minister brusquely. "I want to see him—very, very opportune." He seemed suddenly to have sprung into a more natural state of mind at the sight of these commonplace bits of pasteboard.

"I shall arrange for you," he said practically. "Mr. Crossdale will go over to Cye for the winter; we will cage him there like a bear. He cannot annoy you in any way like this—Mount Nepta is impassable until the spring."

The color came rioting back into the face of Karmen Mara. His name, staring at her from the bit of pasteboard, "Mr. Stephen Crossdale," seemed so clean-cut, so simple, so little connected with treachery and vulgarity.

"I have never heard of anything so extraordinary in my life!" she exclaimed. "Why, he calls on me as frankly as though I were—" and she stopped for lack of the proper word.

The servant who had brought the cards made a profound salutation and begged a thousand pardons of her Majesty and his Excellency, but the gentleman had asked for the Princess Mariska. Karmen Mara exclaimed triumphantly: "Don't you see? Don't you see? He hasn't the least idea that I am anyone else but Mariska?"

CHAPTER XXX

A PEACOCK'S FEATHER BRINGS GOOD LUCK TO A
SAILOR, BAD LUCK TO A MAN WHOSE WIFE IS
AWAY FROM HOME, AND SIGHT TO THE
BLIND (KARMANIAN PROVERB)

Karol found Crossdale not in the peacock room, but in a lovely little library in blue and gold, gazing up at the books with his back to the door. He wheeled as Karol entered and in the brusque way in which he greeted the Premier of a Kingdom, appeared to have forgotten whatever he may have assimilated of court etiquette in Karmania. He stared at the Minister accusingly, solemnly.

He looked as though he had neither slept well nor eaten at breakfast. He had the appearance of being a flesh and blood man in a paper setting. He had been working with ardor and passion when he had heard a piece of news which had chilled him to the marrow, and as he was, he had left his workmen and come by the way of Pratz-Zenoe, round by the plains to the capital, and made his way to the palace without invitation or permission. He wore his working clothes—he could have hardly told himself what he had on; but he had no time to go back and change. He dressed in that rough country, with the rough men, often in his ranchman dress of khaki breeches, stuffed into riding boots, a woollen shirt, with a bright handkerchief round his neck. So

he stood, with a leather belt about his waist and his big sombrero beneath his arm.

He had created much sensation as he rode to Savia. The Prime Minister glanced him up and down in amused contempt. He had in his own mind, back of him, all the scene just enacted with the Queen, and this fellow, in a wild west show costume, with the mud of Karmania on his boots, had magnetized the Queen! "What is this horrible news about Stanislas Korvan?"

Prince Karol was very fine at this moment. Gravely, with the solemnity of a man who alone is calm in a political crisis, stands serenely amongst traitors and throne-wreckers, said in the most worldly tone: "How perfectly charming to see you, Mr. Crossdale, in this delightfully friendly and unexpected fashion! I am sorry they did not take you into the peacock room—it is so cheerful. But since we are here—" Karol dropped down on a corner of the sofa, but the young engineer stood firmly planted on his feet, glaring at him as though Karol himself were the executioner. "Crossdale, we are terribly moved. Her Majesty is cruelly distressed, as you may imagine."

Crossdale interrupted, accusing, his gray-blue eyes full of fire. "Why, they say that Stanislas may be executed! It isn't possible! It isn't true! I have come all the way from Cye—it has taken me hard traveling nearly a week—"

"My dear Crossdale, won't you sit down?" The Prime Minister indicated a comfortable chair, in which the figure of the big ranchman would have been extremely incongruous.

"No, damn it, I won't sit down! I have not been able to

believe that anything was true in your kingdom, but when I hear that a man with whom I have eaten and slept, of whom I am as fond as a brother, may be put out of the running in a few hours, then I understand that kings and ministers and queens and the rest of us are the same blood and flesh!"

Karol did not appear to take offense at the brusque, rude speech of Crossdale, who had no time to play with etiquette. "Korvan is being tried by court martial. He is an officer; he will be condemned by his own class."

"Why," said Crossdale, thrusting his hands in his pockets and protruding his chin a little forward as he talked to the great man, "you don't know what I have done for your cause over there with my men—I have got some influence on them, your Excellency. There are only a hundred and fifty just there, south of Pratz-Zenoe. The only way I could keep them all from walking with their picks and shovels and dynamite to Pratz-Zenoe, was by coming myself and swearing that cost what it would, I would bring Korvan back."

Prince Karol stared at him. This was really very, very picturesque! "I forgive you, Mr. Crossdale," he said, with more sincerity than he had hitherto put in his voice. "You are an American; you cannot understand our point of view. But even in your spotless and ideal land there have been spies and traitors. They have been treated as Korvan will be treated. I may mention Nathan Hale, Major Andre and others. Now you, for instance, if you hadn't successfully kept out of all intrigue, you might have been in prison tonight in Karmania—indeed, you would have been until your Government could have looked after you."

After offering a cigar to Crossdale, which was refused, Karol scrutinized it, clipped the end with a gold clipper, satisfied himself with the label and said: "Now that is really very fine of you to have controlled your men in that fashion. I expected it of you, however. When we left you, as we have, quite free to come and go without any surveillance, for this is the fact, we have given you your mail and permitted you to write without censorship, we have proved our entire confidence in you—notably," said the Prime Minister, "your comrade was taken and sent to prison, and you remained free and unsuspected." He held Crossdale with his cold serene look.

"I don't know why," said the American. "I have been the boon companion of this man ever since we started operations on the road. I don't believe in your confidence—not a little bit, Prince Karol, but I would not be surprised to find myself handcuffed before I leave the palace today. Nothing would surprise me."

"Oh, you are too suspicious," shrugged the Prime Minister, "far too suspicious! You should have more trust in people who trust you. Now, for instance, I am sure you would like to have some news of that missing negro."

"Jeff?—you mean my man servant, Jefferson Robinson?"

"I dare say that that is his name—it might as well be that as another. But what a type! I promise you he is not to be shot before sunrise!"

"Do you know where he is?"

"Here in Savia."

"Under arrest?"

"Oh, not at all—not at all. He is giving the most delightful satisfaction in the role he is playing at present."

Crossdale had perched on the arm of a chair in a most informal fashion. He sprang up.

"Your Excellency!" he exclaimed. "I warn you not to lay a hand on that man, or you will be called to account for it by the United States."

The Prime Minister put out his hand in the most soothing fashion. "My dear Crossdale, don't be wrought up! I can understand your friendly feeling about a man who has to die the death of a traitor, especially when this man has been so close to you; but we will return your precious negro to you by parcel post one of these days. Don't you really know what he is doing?"

"I don't," said Crossdale shortly.

Prince Karol threw his head back and laughed with delightful enjoyment of the amusing situation. "Mr. Robinson is one of the assistant cooks to the Queen, making Southern Maryland chicken for Her Majesty."

Crossdale's jaw almost dropped. "Jeff Robinson cooking for the Queen?"

"He came down from Pratz-Zenoe a fortnight ago with a crowd of merry-makers from Roda. I believe he was part of a traveling circus. He got very tipsy and they say that on a wager he offered himself to the royal kitchens as assistant cook."

"By Jove!"

"The chef took him on. The chief cook is a Hungarian who has cooked in one of the big hotels in Florida in the United States; he speaks American as well as you do, and

he likes negroes. Her Majesty does not know, of course, of this addition to the royal cuisine but they say that she has a great fancy for his Southern dishes. For the present, however, he will not be allowed to leave the family circle downstairs." Prince Karol cackled appreciatively, the softest kind of laugh, a maddening little laugh. "I hoped you would see the humor of it. Captain Ugo will keep him under his surveillance—you may be sure that he is carefully observed."

Crossdale murmured in a low voice a few things which it was perhaps just as well that the Prime Minister did not follow. Then he said:

"Frankly, this does not get across to me, your Excellency. I believe you are using this poor chap to spy into my life. I bet he is undergoing the third degree and doesn't know it."

"Nonsense, Crossdale!" said the Prime Minister rather sternly. "In order to prove our good faith to you as far as this negro is concerned, he shall return to you at once—I will see that he meets you in Cy, where I understand that you will return. I will speak to the head steward about it myself." Then, in order to put an end to this topic of conversation, the Prime Minister asked abruptly: "Now, when will you run your first train through to Roda?"

Stephen sighed. He was not visionary and he understood that he had been able to do nothing for Korvan. He felt his utter powerlessness in this moment of such great importance. His long spirited ride from the heart of his mutinous men to the capital was for nothing, unless the

letter in his pocket to the Princess Mariska could work a miracle. He answered colorlessly:

"If I am not murdered or assassinated I will run a car through in the spring."

"Spring begins early in Karmania."

"In May."

"Excellent!" The Prime Minister seemed to appreciate this special cigar in a special fashion, turned it affectionately, almost smiling at it. "It is a long ride you have taken, a long journey, Mr. Crossdale. I don't know what hospitality you will find in the hotel, but they say it is fairly comfortable. You will have to stop a night or so." He looked indulgently at Crossdale's clothes. "You will have to let us send you round some—"

"Oh," interrupted the young man, "how can you speak in this cold-blooded fashion, speak to me of conventions, your Excellency? 'Shot before sunrise on Sunday' was the word I got down at Cy, and I can't believe it's true! And you've got a woman in the government, a Queen! Women should have hearts!" he exclaimed.

Here the Prime Minister rose with more snap than he had shown. "Her Majesty has nothing whatever to do with death sentences," he said. "Karmanian law provides for these possibilities of tender-hearted women—Karmanian rulers are often women."

"Well," exclaimed the young man definitely, "miracles happen, and I have not given up hope yet. I didn't ride here just to try to thaw you out, your Excellency. I had another hope. Before I leave, if a mere democrat can aspire to such a favor, I would like to see the Princess Mariska."

"Delighted!" said the Prime Minister, in the most cordial manner. "I am sure she will be perfectly delighted to see you."

"I just sent my card up," said the American simply. "I dare say it was not court etiquette, but I have got to see her if there is any way of doing it." And he waited.

The Prime Minister thawed now and came forward to Crossdale. He tried to link arms through the ranchman's, but he might as well have tried to encircle the town pump—the arm was as stiff as iron.

"Let's come into the peacock room. If you are going to see a lady, it is an agreeable room, so cheerful."

Karol threw open a little door from the library, a door set in the wainscoting. He opened it into the most beautiful room that Stephen had ever imagined. The decorations were peacocks—peacocks on the ceiling, on the walls; the furniture was white brocade, embroidered in glowing peacocks; the color everywhere was a deep blue and pale crimson and white.

"Now," said the Prime Minister, trotting across the floor and ringing by means of a silken bell rope an inaudible bell, "we will send word to the Princess that you have done her the honor to ask for her. It is a quaint room, isn't it?"

Dazzled by the color and the beauty, the young American was thinking: "I shall see her again now in this wonderful and inhuman place! This is her setting, she is part of the court, she belongs here, she is a Princess!"

He believed that the letter addressed to her in Korvan's handwriting would work the miracle for Stanislas. She would have power with the higher powers. This for Kor-

van—and then for himself. He had kissed her, he had held her in his arms; he knew that she was a flesh and blood woman, with senses and desires like his own! If she really cared, if it had been anything but caprice, she would see him!

He glanced down almost timidly at his rough dress. "Gad," he thought, "I didn't realize what I was going to look like when I called on her in the palace!"

The bell was answered by an English butler, a staid, perfectly conventional Anglo-Saxon.

"Will you tell the Princess Mariska that Mr. Crossdale has called and that he is with me in the peacock room?"

"Beg pardon, your Excellency, but her Royal Highness left the capital this morning for Pratz-Zenoe."

"Ah!" ejaculated the Prime Minister in honest surprise. "We knew nothing of this whatsoever. Left the capital? Her Royal Highness was here last evening, Parsons."

"Your Excellency she went with her personal servants in great haste—she went directly the news was received here concerning poor Lieutenant Korvan."

"Very good, Parsons."

The man withdrew and the Premier turned to Crossdale "I am so awfully sorry, my dear fellow," he said, "that you should have come so far for such a wretched disappointment. But between you and me, I didn't know that you knew my niece." He watched the young man's expressive and mobile face cunningly. It seemed as though the light had been struck out of the American. His heart and face seemed frozen.

"Is it possible," he heard the Prime Minister say, "that

you have been such a great friend of Korvan's, his companion, his associate, and did not know anything of his sentimental life?"

Again as though Crossdale were some kind of waxworks, who needed to be animated, the Prime Minister linked his arm through the young man's iron arm and piloted him toward a door at the other end of the peacock room, leading out on the terrace.

"There is no reason why I should not tell you, although I still think it is extraordinary that Korvan did not tell you himself."

As this seemed to be a question, after which the Prime Minister paused, Crossdale formed the words: "I know nothing whatsoever about his personal life."

"He did not think you were interested in sentimental things, I dare say—American men are supposed to be absorbed in business and not in love. Princess Mariska is tacitly engaged to Korvan—they have been madly in love for years. Under these circumstances, you can imagine what a frightful thing this is for the Queen's sister. Her Majesty and I were discussing it together when your card was brought up."

The young man whom the Prime Minister piloted along seemed scarcely to move of his own volition. He was stunned. Karol put his hand with apparent affection on his shoulder. "Come," he said, "don't take Korvan's punishment too much to heart. You know as well as I do that a man cannot betray his country without paying the penalty. The honor of a man's country and the honor of a woman

are sacred things, and who play for these stakes pay with their lives."

The Prime Minister was continuing his fine rhetorical speech of which the Queen had made light. He liked the sound of his own voice extremely. He was about to give Crossdale his conge when three officers of the Royal Guard entered at the other end of the room, their spurs noisy on the blue-tiled floor.

"One moment," said his Excellency. "Let me speak with these gentlemen. As it happens, they are to take in hand the guarding of the line between Roda and Cye. We shall watch the Royal State Railway as though it were a little child."

These captains of the Queen's Guard made a brilliant spot of color in their full-dress uniform, feathered casques in their hands, green, white and scarlet, against the effective decorations of the peacock room.

The American merely glanced at them—toy soldiers, men of glass, painted mummers. In his heart was the stab that had been given him. His house of happiness was falling around his soul.

The window in the door before him was wide open and looked out on an ancient loggia, long, covered, extending across the study and the private apartments of the Queen. He looked out, slowly coming back to life, the things before him only beginning to take shape. He would have to break away from here, go away with this anguish in his heart, and return, vanquished, to Cye, unable to move any of these puppets by a human string.

As he stared, a woman came out on the balcony, followed

by a big wolfhound. Over a black dress she had thrown a splendid cloak edged with sable. She was hatless and her dark, fine little head was bared to the bright sunlight. Two long earrings fell from her ears.

He saw her distinctly, could have spoken to her from where he stood in the door of the peacock room. But she was not looking that way. Immobile, she was looking out over the plains toward Crossdale's mushroom-like tower. With one hand on the head of the dog, she leaned, with the other on the balcony, like a figure carved out of stone.

Crossdale, transfixed, with his emotions so varied that he never hoped to set them straight, kept repeating to himself: "But the Princess Mariska isn't here—she has gone to Pratz-Zenoe. She isn't here!" He stared at the woman leaning on the stone of the loggia as though he could never look enough, as though he must make the picture real. She was beautiful, she was gracious, she was royal—oh, very, very royal! But she was as truly the likeness of the chromo over the taproom mantelpiece of his little picture at home, as a woman could be.

He heard Prince Karol's steps returning to him, trotting over the blue-tiled floor. Without turning his eyes to the Prime Minister, the American caught his arm. Pointing toward the loggia, trying to make his voice and words fit together to express human sounds, he asked: "Is that the Queen?"

He remembers riding down from the castle through the town over the little, lumpy, sharp stones of those ancient streets, between the close little houses huddled together;

past public fountains, with the evening groups around them of lovely children and lovely women, some of them veiled; past lovers and past the homeward returning laborer. He remembers riding down the hill with all of its noise and its humming and its jargon, and its voices back of him like strange barbaric music, like something sinister, something unexpressed and yet vocal. He remembers looking back, looking up at the little Karmanian city, the climbing city, the hill city, to the castle with its twinkling lights.

He remembers his long ride home, through the cold twilight and early night, to his desolate tower. He remembers seeing it rise in the dark, holding up for him the light in his study window like a beacon for his return. Then he remembers going up the winding stair, following Serga, going into his little study, where the dogs lay attentive for his coming, and throwing himself down on the green leather sofa and covering his eyes with his hands. Whether he fell asleep, whether he had something like a syncope, he never knew, because of that evening he remembers nothing else.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE EARL OF MORAY GOES STAUN'IN' THROUGH THE TOWN

"Your Majesty is quite right. Mr. Crossdale is not under surveillance."

"Ah!" The Queen drew in her breath and held back her natural expression of delight. She could not let Ugo see what these words meant to her. But he saw. He had heard too much of what had been going on in the Kingdom not to understand.

"I thought not; I was sure of it." Her voice, rich at all times and full of cadence, gave her away almost every time she spoke. From a corner of the dark wood chest on which she had perched, her cloak fallen to the floor, her face raised toward this servant of the secret service, Queen Karmen Mara had listened to what Ugo had told her of the state of her kingdom, of Prince Sarvan's chances of escape. She had listened to all the tremendously important things which meant so much to her country, and at the end she had put him a question.

From the balcony, after Crossdale had seen her standing there, she had looked out until the portcullis of the castle door had clanged and she had seen the American engineer go riding down the primitive streets, over the big cobbles, in his cowboy dress. She saw him go. She was taking a long

farewell of him, with a heaving breast and a great anger against him and herself in her heart.

Then he disappeared, and she wished that he had come back again; that she had not let him go; that she had shown him the letter and been only a woman and not a sovereign. She remembered a line in an old Scottish ballad:

"And long shall his ladye look from the castle down,
To see the Earl of Moray come staun'in' through the town."

"You mean to tell me that Mr. Crossdale's letters come and go freely to the States?"

"Ever since the first week of his arrival in Karmania, your Majesty."

This man had all the Queen's attention, straining forward, her expressive hands linking and unlinking their fingers.

"You were a spy, Captain Ugo, but I have trusted you always—"

"I thank your Majesty."

She sprang up. From a little desk in the corner of the dark-ceiled little room, she took a Karmanian bank note; she took one, she took two; she rolled them together.

"Ugo, take this—put it away. Money is never a bad thing to have."

"That which is given me by my Queen is a sacred gift. I thank your Majesty profoundly."

She continued speaking rapidly, standing now in front of the spy whose respectful attention was riveted upon her.

"It seems extraordinary that in times like these of revolt

and rebellion, strangers should be so free, without suspicion."

The spy smiled subtly. "I fell into disgrace when this gentleman arrived, as your Majesty knows. Ever since, for a selfish reason, in order to win back, I have watched him with a special fidelity. The Prime Minister knows that I am climbing back by my reports of Mr. Crossdale."

She nodded. "I know, I know." And her eyes asked.

The man responded to the silent question: "Mr. Crossdale is a business man. He has nothing to do with political intrigues. His ambition is to complete his railroad and go back to America. My reports to the Prime Minister are accepted without question. Although he has lived for months with Lieutenant Korvan, and the Prince Sarvan was found hidden in his cabin, all this does not touch him—I would stake my life upon it."

He saw her draw in her breath again with delight, with relief, and he waited quietly. "You are surprisingly sympathetic with this gentleman, Captain Ugo. I wonder why?"

"Most of us achieve freedom, your Majesty, in these countries. Mr. Crossdale was born free. And I admire him physically and mentally. I worship force and I worship freedom; my fathers were serfs. My dream is to go to the United States; he would be an invaluable friend."

The man standing patiently before his sovereign was the only one in the kingdom who could set her mind perfectly at rest. She took from her belt, where she had thrust it, the letter the Premier had given her. She smoothed it out; she handed it to Ugo.

When he had finished reading it, he looked at her. His

expression, however, revealed nothing of his surprise. "It is a lie, your Majesty."

"I knew it to be so—at least, I believed it must be."

"A fraud to defame this gentleman in your Majesty's eyes."

The spy was almost abashed to look upon the radiant face of this woman in love, whose lover he was clearing by his affirmation. He had always thought her the most beautiful woman in Europe; but he had never dreamed that she could look as she did now, so human, so glowing. He turned away. He thought there were tears on the lids of her eyes.

Then, fully mistress of herself, she added: "You must give me proof, Captain Ugo."

"Mr. Crossdale has never written a line with pen and ink since he came to Karmania; there is not a drop of ink in the cabin where this is supposed to have been written. He writes on a Corona typewriter; he signs his name with a pencil. And the ink with which this letter is so carefully written, your Majesty, is the ink which the Prime Minister uses for his private correspondence." Ugo's laugh was ugly. He hated Prince Karol; he would have given a year of his life to see him fall. Everything he could say now was in direct construction of the plan he had against the Prime Minister.

"Horrible! Incredible!" he heard the Queen murmur.

"So many things are fair, your Majesty, when one has a point to gain in politics or sentiment."

But she proceeded: "Had this letter been an authentic one from Mr. Crossdale, would it have come into your hands?"

The spy shook his head. "No, nor in the hands of the Prime Minister, either. The secret-service men are all under my orders. No one tampers with Mr. Crossdale's mail."

A great rush of anger came over her against her uncle, against herself for having for a moment doubted this man to whom in the generosity of her nature she had given so much, and whom she loved, and to whom she was ready to give all. As though the moment were a rich one and for which he had waited, out of which he was going to make all he could, the spy said:

"Since we are speaking of Mr. Crossdale, and I have your Majesty's gracious permission, I will tell you in a word of his entrance into the country."

She bade him sit down. The spy did so, stiffly, on one of the old chairs, leather-covered, bronze-studded, and the Queen going behind her desk, sat there, elbows on the table, and with her chin sunk in the palms of her hands, listening to him as a girl to a fairy tale.

"When Mr. Crossdale left Tamaresk for Cye to meet my caravan—" began the spy.

She listened. She heard him tell of Crossdale's broken journey; she saw him riding blindfolded to Jehanospelz; she saw herself starting out with those servants who had sold themselves to the rebel.

As Ugo told her all, she listened with crimson cheeks and bright eyes, loving him more, admiring him more every moment. It was a Tale of Araby, a tale of wonder and delight to this woman, protected so carefully always, and to whom, as to all women, deeds of courage and sudden action appealed. His modesty, his reserve, the fact that he

had done so much and claimed nothing, made him dearer than ever to her. When Ugo had finished she asked:

"What has the kingdom done for Mr. Crossdale to repay him?"

Ugo smiled ironically. "One of the peculiarities of the Prime Minister's nature is not to repay services. Mr. Crossdale's are ignored, unknown."

Karmen Mara never moved from where she sat when the spy left her. She was the happiest woman in her kingdom at that moment, although the monarchy tottered. It could fall to which side it liked. She was free—free, that is, to love. There was nothing between Crossdale and herself but the *enceinte* of the little city in the rich plain. There he was and there she was, without a barrier. Her thoughts could go to him; and they went with a rush and a passion that any man would have been proud to have awakened in the heart of a woman.

She was sitting like this, musing, moved, wondering how she could communicate with him before he should go to Cyé, when the tapestry on the door was lifted and Refan Ugo again stood in the room. He brought a letter. "I met the messenger on the stairs, your Majesty, and I craved the honor of bringing Mr. Crossdale's letter myself to you." He bowed and was gone.

Karmen Mara broke the seal. Within was the letter to the Princess Mariska which Crossdale had come to the castle to deliver in the hopes that it might save Stanislas' life. Then, on another slip of paper—not written with a Corona typewriter, but indeed with a very soft pencil:

"When I was waiting in the peacock room to learn Kor-

van's fate and to give this letter to the Princess Mariska, I saw standing on a balcony the woman I love, the woman whose picture I bought when I was a young man in Boston; the woman I have kissed and held; the one I want and shall want until I die.

"They tell me she is the Queen of Karmania. God! I wish she were a country girl who could come with me and be my wife and my love! As she is the Queen, I hope that she will spare the life of Korvan, if she can. And for my part, although she is a Queen, I know that she is a woman with a heart and feelings. I ask her to remember our kisses and I leave my fate in her hands.

"Stephen Crossdale."

So Crossdale wore out the winter, hearing nothing whatsoever from Savia. He waited, although what he waited for he could scarcely have told. He supposed that the Prime Minister had told her that she was *incognita* no longer, and she would expect him to look upon their romance as a dream.

He never left Cyé thereafter and absorbed himself in his work on the railroad. That winter the snows were heavy. He contrived snowploughs and himself superintended the work in the absence of Korvan and his second superintendent. The Savian side of the railroad he left in the hands of O'Dell, and controlled the works at Cyé himself alone. But, curiously enough, since his visit to the capital he appeared to have gone very high in the favor of the Prime Minister. He had become the man whom Prince Karol delighted to honor.

The realization that he loved a Queen came upon him with a strange dignity, a sense of being a man set apart—perhaps for tragedy, and certainly for renunciation. A sense of delicacy, a sense of his own unworthiness of her and of all it meant, kept him silent and apart. He made no sign whatsoever.

Revolution slept for the time in Karmania. The little kingdom was not yet ripe for democracy. Sarvanarof's and Sarvan's names were no more heard. A moment of rest passed over the kingdom, and the Queen became astoundingly popular. Her name was on every lip, her songs were sung wherever there was voice and breath to sing them. People made her a goddess, and the fame of her came over the top of Mount Nepta.

In order to express to the engineer his new friendliness Prince Karol (presumably he) commandeered *Las Restaurus* for the engineer and Crossdale spent the winter in the Queen's lodge.

She had prorogued Parliament; she had taken things in her own hands, and was making a great impression on her people. She went among them in native dress, gave them concessions, left them their lands. And Prince Karol, in order to hold the monarchy together, withdrew more and more, and Queen Karmen Mara became the headpiece.

Stanislas Korvan was not pardoned; neither was he executed. But he escaped from the prison in Pratz-Zenoe. The fact of his escape proved to Crossdale how strong the propaganda was of Prince John—that the warders in the prison were his creatures.

O'Dell came over by way of Pratz-Zenoe several times

during the winter, bringing news of the capital, of Queen Karmen Mara's brilliant reign.

Meanwhile he had no news of Jeff Robinson, who seemed to have disappeared off the face of Central Europe. Crossdale shot his bears in the snow, shot boars, and the furs piled up in the fur room of the hunting lodge. But for three days at Christmas he retired to his old quarters and spent Christmas there with the memories of Sarvan and Korvan, for her Majesty indulged a whim to pass the holidays in the forest. He never saw her, never caught a glimpse of her, though she hunted and went sleighing on the Steppes.

But he went back to Las Restaurus later, and there was throughout the rooms the scent of violets, and on his desk in his own rooms was a copy of her book of Karmanian folk songs. And the place was full of flowers brought over from her greenhouses at the castle. There were bowls and bowls of yellow roses. He began to admire her as a Queen, her triumph in the kingdom, and he was obliged to put aside his own part in her existence and to crush down his memories.

In the first days of the year, among his American letters, postmarked from New York, came a letter to him from John Sarvanarof. The Prince thanked him warmly for the work he was carrying on for Karmania; he thanked him for the future of the country and told Crossdale that he was serving the cause of democracy.

In closing, Sarvanarof sent greetings from Sarvan and Korvan and himself.

"The man's mad!" the American thought.

He burned the letter and wrote to Storm:

"I have no time to look for oil. I shall run my first cars through from the capital to Roda end of April or beginning of May, then all the other Johnnies can do the rest. As soon as I see daylight through my tunnel, I'm off for the U. S. A."

In April he had taken up his quarters again in his old brown tower, to superintend the final operations from the Savia side of the tunnel.

CHAPTER XXXII

WHEN THE BOYA-DUC COMES FROM THE FAR COUNTRY
THE WOMAN WILL DANCE WITH HIM THOUGH IT BE
OVER HER HUSBAND'S GRAVE. (KARMANIAN PROVERB.)

No spring had ever been to him what this spring in Karmania was. When he had come over to the capital the whole place was as lonely as a deserted bird's nest, for the Queen was in Paris. As every smart woman should do, she had gone to the Rue de la Paix to buy clothes. It was more or less a relief to him to know that he should not pass her driving or riding. He had grown to accept her silence as a thing she had determined for them both. This was his fate—to love a woman so high above him that he could never possibly win her. It would have been better to have loved a barmaid? Ah, *chi zaru?* as the Karmanians say, which means: Who in heaven or earth can tell?

He saw from his brown tower the bloom break over the flat country. Town and mountain and little nestling farm were all curtained off by pink and yellow blossom. The plain became a mass of coral and young green growth. The forests opened up their cedar chests of pungent scent.

Altogether it was enough to make a young man mad. Crossdale leaned out of his little window, quite drunk with the joy of living, because he was strong and young, and he was not ashamed of the passion in his veins. As the late April air met him he said: "I have slept too long in Cye.

What is she that she should not be loved? I have been a coward! I will write her again."

The little capital climbed up its hill toward the fair sky, and the whole country conspired to make him forget that he was anything but a lover. Class and distinction seemed but the most foul man-made things, and only the primitive feelings of heart and senses worth creation. On the castle the flag was at half mast, because Karmen Mara was in Paris buying lovely clothes.

He had danced all winter at Cyé and Roda; he was a past master in the native dances. He led the *whirra* with the best Boya-Duc in the kingdom. The dancing festivals were being held everywhere now, in every little town. It was a springtime custom, to dance because one was young and glad and the blood in the veins running like the young sap in the trees toward life and its expression, new birth, rebirth, fecund and natural living.

Crossdale loved the Karmanian peasants because they were beautiful and because they were her people; and he had kissed many a girl under her veil, and kissed the grave-eyed, free-lipped women, too. The young ones, with heavy braids and a knife in the garter, were shy, but the veiled married women were another story.

Savia had been sleeping all the winter under the snow, as he had been sleeping at Cyé, and now warming to life. On the plain within a stone's throw of his tower a circus, which had been in winter quarters at Pratz-Zenoe, was driving in stakes, fetching in show wagons, putting up red, yellow and white tents like a gaily colored striped bouquet. From his tower he could watch all the proceedings. There were

sweetmeat fakers, crude, vulgar little shows, and long aisles of attractions of all kinds, for the circus promised to cover a quarter of a mile of space. The show was on its way to Cyé and Roda and beyond.

Already the Savian boys in stiff white skirts and Savian girls with their thick dark braids grouped around the waltzing bears. All the shows began with a long salute to Her; everything was preluded with "*Heljen!*" and Crossdale echoed it.

A morning's ride across the plain, Heidi-Luc, the prettiest town he had ever seen in his life, was to celebrate the Queen's birthday. He had seen the hut where she had been born, with the hole in the floor for the fire and the single window, all kept sacred like a shrine.

There would be festivals all over the country now in the spring, and not the least important was to be the big celebration at Roda when his first passenger train should transport the cabinet from Savia to Roda. The whole province would rise up and celebrate. It made him laugh to think of it. He could laugh now; he had been able to ever since he came back to Savia. He was young; he was alive; he had learned how to love; he had learned what it is to have one motive force for everything in the world. Over and over again he said to himself: "It isn't given to every man to love a Queen! Cost what it will, I will tell her so!"

He dressed himself in his ranchman's dress to ride over to Heidi-Luc for the Queen's festival. In riding breeches and boots, in a thin flannel shirt, a bit of pear bloom in his scarf and a rabbit's foot in his hat, he rode to Heidi-Luc across the green land.

The women of the long braids and the black eyelashes and the free lips, with lovers and husbands and sons, came on foot and in oxcarts and in mule carts from the country. Every pretty girl and every fine young peasant in Heidi-Luc and thereabouts was abroad, gathered around the rustic platform, listening to the players of the *rodza*, the native flute, sweet as honey in its tone, and with notes like the dripping of water in a silver basin, and the fiddle and mandolin, besides curious antique instruments known only to Karmania and her frontiers. Stiff skirts were stiffer and whiter than ever; tarbushes red as poppies, bright as flame, and the embroidered jackets seemed all just off the embroiderer's frame.

The Queen's little house was almost hidden by trees of blossom propped up against it, until it seemed one blossom itself in the little town.

The American, on his horse, at one side, unobserved, appeared passive, but he felt one with them and ready for the festival. When the "*Heljens!*" had died into silence the dance began, and the clicking feet and the melancholy minor music mingled in mad orgy of sound. The Queen had always come to Heidi-Luc to dance with the Syndic—it was her custom. But this year she was in Paris.

The engineer had not decided whether or not he would dance; he was waiting for an inspiration. Meanwhile he watched the whirling, whirling skirts, the red, yellow, blue and black shoes, the twinkling feet, until the whole picture swam before his eyes.

A cart drawn by two white oxen, garlanded with blossoms, came slowly through Heidi-Luc and up to the platform.

There were two women in the cart, and the one who was veiled wore a white dress embroidered in black and gold, and a short black jacket embroidered in black and gold, soft black shoes with high heels and a little round cap on her dark little head.

As the cart came up she sat watching, whilst her companion, a blonde girl in dress embroidered in red and blue, sprang out and running up the steps of the platform, began to dance with much will and abandon. A murmur of pleasure and satisfaction ran through the crowd, but there was no demonstration whatsoever to indicate that they were royal guests.

The girl was blond and blue eyed and Crossdale knew her from her picture, which he had seen in the restaurant in Cye. The Syndic was her partner. She danced well, but there was nothing extraordinary about her performance. He nodded to the peasant near him, who was saying: "It is her Royal Highness, the Princess Mariska!" gave the man his horse to hold—"And yonder—" crowed the man, but Crossdale did not wait to hear. He watched until the Princess perfunctorily made the gesture of throwing herself against the Syndic's breast. He touched her brow reverently with his hand which had touched his lips; and she disappeared from the stand.

Then the engineer saw the other woman leave the oxcart, run up the steps of the platform, reach it as though she had been blown upon it by a breath of spring, in her white skirt, with its embroidery, in her black coat and her black shoes. It was the *treja* girl, the girl of the Steppes, the

woman of the yellow rose—His Woman, whom he had kissed and held!

Her veil, fastened around her head by a gold tape, was short to her chin and blown a bit from her face, and he could see her cheek and her dark crisp hair under her cap.

She raised her arms with the castanets, took the traditional pose of the invitation and began to dance the *whirra*. The crowd watched her in breathless silence; according to custom the Queen was never cheered in her native town until she gave the signal.

The American watched a first-rate performance, for Karmen Mara danced like a professional. The peasants began to go wild, to cry to her, to applaud her, to call her in their picturesque language—their bird—their little daughter—their little rose—their little sister! And their excitement reached her.

At the first notes of the *whirra*, as the *rodza* calls the invitation, Karmen Mara, looking around for the peasant Boya-Duc, beat her small black feet on the boards of the platform. The Boya-Duc is supposed to answer the invitation. Flinging down his sombrero, with one bound Crossdale was on the platform, facing the Queen, in the pose the Boya-Duc takes when he responds to the call.

There was a breathless pause, a murmur, half discordant, unfriendly, for this was the Syndic's special honor. But the dancer threw down her cap, threw back her head and shook free her hair, that was short to her neck in dark curls, nodded, and the next thing Crossdale knew he was dancing to the barbaric music of the *whirra*, the partner of the Queen—to the flute, the tambourine, the violin, and the

temperamental, barbaric music that he had loved, with which he was familiar, and which he had followed through little Karmania from town to town.

The melody, the crying and the calling, ran with the fire in his veins, beat in the blood in his cheeks, made his breath short and catch him; he parted his lips to take in more freely his delight. Heidi-Luc never saw a dance like this, for the man and woman went mad in it. If the Queen were a wonder, so was her partner, in his riding boots, in his soft shirt, hatless, full of life and full of the passion of the dance and the passion of the moment.

As the dance progressed the *whirra* grew wilder, more tempestuous, madder, and when the moment came and they had danced around each other until the world seemed to swim, he felt that there was no moment in life worth living for him if the Queen did not end the *whirra* with its traditional climax and throw herself upon his breast.

But his dancing partner seemed as charmed as he; excitement gained her as it had gained Crossdale. She was a barbarian, born of the Steppes themselves; she was the woman of the hunt, and the woman of the sledge ride. Passion and life were as inborn in her as are the light and the sun to the universe.

She had lived on the memory of his touch and his kisses, and as she threw herself for a brief second against his breast, as the music called and then fell into silence, it seemed to him that he could never breathe again without her near him, and that if he had to let her go he would die.

He tore off her veil, bound as it was across her hair by the golden band, stared down into her face, at her parted

lips, at her shining eyes. He was only a dancer, the Boya-Duc of the festival; the eyes of her people were on them!

He said in a low voice: "Karmen Mara—I have found you! Little Queen!"

She was apart from him again, had given the signal and the "*Heljens!*" filled the air and seemed to swamp them and to bear her away, mad with joy.

Tingling from head to foot, his brain full of stars, wet to the skin, his shirt clinging to him like a rag, he leaned against one of the supports of the platform until his senses should reel into place. It had been the wildest, most wonderful moment of his life.

He saw the Queen run down the steps, rejoin her sister at the rustic vehicle, with the crowd at the very skirt of her dress, and he watched her with happy eyes. Nothing on God's earth could take this from him, if he never saw her again.

Some one told him that the Queen wished to speak to him. As he stood by the side of her oxcart she leaned over her sister, resting her arm on Mariska's lap, and he saw her near, saw again that vivid, brilliant little face, all lit now by the fire in her, the excitement.

"How do you do? I've so often wanted to meet you! This is my sister, the Princess Mariska."

And he realized—and could have laughed aloud at it—that he was being formally presented to the Princess whom he had thought he loved, formally presented by the woman for whom he would have died and whom he had held in his arms. Why, the world had gone mad!"

"How wonderfully you danced the *whirra!* You must be

Karmanian. You will be a famous Boya-Duc—where did you learn?"

Was that her voice? Yes. He had heard it in his sleep, it had called to him in the cold winter nights, in his lonely mateless room, when he had gone to his rest wanting her and when he had wakened and felt that the days would never be days until he could see her and speak.

"I have been dancing all winter," he said. "I have reversed the fable, haven't I? If I've danced all winter, will it mean that I must starve all summer?"

He could be gay. He looked from one to another of the sisters. They were both laughing with him.

The Princess Mariska, in conventional, colorless English said: "Stanislas Korvan told me much about you. I feel as though I knew you. Americans are wonderful dancers."

He rode alongside of them by the oxcart across the plain to the foot of the hill, where he put her sister and herself in the carriage that waited for Her Majesty, with its four horses and two postilions and a mounted guard.

CHAPTER XXXIII

MR. RAT COMES TO TOWN

Jeff Robinson had disappeared again, from the castle, but Crossdale believed neither Karol nor Refan Ugo when they told him that they knew nothing of the negro's whereabouts. He was frightfully concerned about the man, and wrote to put the matter in the hands of the authorities at Bukarest.

One afternoon with boyish interest he watched the circus outspread on the plain before his tower window. There was no need for him to put his eye to a hole in the canvas; he could look directly into one of the rings over the roofless brown tent. He could see as though from a box the beautiful lady in scarlet going round and round on her traditional white horse, whose progress was impeded by the clowns.

The barracks and the shanties of his own yards were a bit beyond the circus. The smoke rose from his engines; he heard the whistles tooting over the banging band. Peace had entirely gone from the beautiful Karmanian plain.

But he could not put Jeff Robinson out of his mind. What the devil had the man done? Run after some native woman, of course! He understood the negro's vanity and his love of wealth; he was always trying some turn at a lottery, some game of chance. Only his master's influence kept him from gambling away everything he had.

Crossdale remembered very distinctly Robinson's extraordinary interest in the possibilities of the Karmanian oil fields. He knew that one of Jeff's weaknesses was for reading his letters and he left them around as little as possible. But he was perfectly sure that Jeff had possessed himself of all the information regarding the Western Transportation Company's plans for accumulating wealth in Karmania. The little portfolio in which he had kept a series of letters from Storm had disappeared with Jeff. But how in heaven's name could he use any of this information he wondered, as he leaned against the window sill, watching the clowns in the ring.

One big fellow amused him mightily. In white, once clean, a peaked clown's cap, face whitewashed like the side of a house, there was something familiar in his poses. Then a tune of the band caught Crossdale's ear. He hummed it before he realized that he knew it well, and that Jeff used to sing it to the banjo on the ranch.

"Mr. Rat has come to town, um—um—"

To this spiritual announcement the big clown waltzed like a tee-totum. It seemed awfully strange to hear this in the Balkans!

"To get his wife a wedding gown—"

He could almost hear Jeff's voice singing it.

"What shall the wedding breakfast be?"

This was the last performance of the country circus in Karmania. It had been all through the provinces. Cross-

dale had heard of it everywhere. It was a Roumanian circus, three ringed, enormous, and with hundreds of people. Because of the extremely fine weather they had unroofed the rings.

As soon as they could pack up their paraphernalia, box up the snakes, they were going to proceed to Cyé, Roda, and from thence out of the country.

"Mr. Rat has come to town
To get his wife a wedding gown—"

Poor old Jeff Robinson must have been near the winter quarters of these people, at Pratz-Zenoe. They had stolen his song from him. He would go over to see them, interview them, find out something about the negro.

"What shall the wedding breakfast be?
A piece of bread and a cup of tea."

Poor old Jeff! He must have followed this circus like a boy!

The big clown threw handsprings on his white gloves and soft shoes out of the ring and disappeared. Then Crossdale wheeled. "Gad! Isn't that the best ever!"

Some one rushed upstairs. He opened the door. "Hello, Boss! Howdy, Mister Crossdale?"

He had expected to see Jeff Robinson one day or another, but never like this. His whitewash was marvellous; nowhere would he have passed for a negro, except for the big red lips. His face was working, however, with emotion. With his big flat feet in their soft white shoes, his flapping hands in their dirty gloves, he was pathetic, he was ridiculous.

"Jumping Moses!" exclaimed the Californian. "Go and get those filthy duds off you, Robinson! What in thunder—?"

As the man showed no signs of moving, Crossdale continued: "Hurry up—go into the next room and clean up if you can!"

"No, no, Mister Crossdale." The clown shook his head. "No, no, Boss. Ah can't stay a minute—yo'll hab to let me go, b'lieve me I couldn't lebe now—ah'm all tied up wid dat bunch ob spo'ts. It means life and death ef ah don't keep ma contract."

"Contract!" said Crossdale furiously. "What the deuce do you mean by taking on any contract but mine? I'll have you transported—thrown over the frontier, Robinson! You've got to come to your senses, man! Take those things off or I'll kick you out of them. And now tell me where my letters are from Mr. Storm. Where is my little red wallet?"

"Why," said the negro, with wide open eyes, "now yo' don' go fo' to t'ink—?"

No, Crossdale could not. There was that in the sweetly modulated voice, in the man's face, that made him trust him against all appearances.

"Think, damn you! I don't have to think—I want to know!"

"Ah don' hid dem in de Cyé cabin under de bricks ob de chimley floor. Yo'll sure find dem all dere."

"What for, you fool?"

"Why, suh," said the negro, "yo' sure ain' de only person dat's got 'n interest in dose wells, Mister Crossdale."

Just then from without the band took another turn at "Mr. Rat," and the negro, as though it were a signal to him, dropped on his knees, rolled the whites of his eyes, and blubbered:

"Ah've got to go back! Ah've got to go back! Right away, or yo'll be shot up and ah will to! Ah'm attached to dis circus. It woul' make a book ef ah tol' yo' all, an' ef ah stay here wid yo' now, Mister Crossdale, dey'll hab me liver and me lights."

Crossdale looked at him in frank surprise. "You make me sick," he said. But he saw that the man's excitement was running high.

Jeff went on: "Ah'll shake de whol' bunch ober at Roda nex' week, trus' me as fur as Roda, Boss—dat's all ah ask."

Crossdale was furiously angry with the man. "I'm going to have you arrested! I'm not going to let you leave this tower!"

The man had risen to his feet and was slinking toward the door.

"I bet it's some wretched little side-show girl!" Crossdale said. "Some miserable little native woman here, you fool!"

The man burst into unexpected giggles and covered his mouth with his hand. "Boss," he said, "yo're on, yo' sure am on!"

"Get out," said Crossdale, irritatedly. "I expect you'll turn up somewhere before I get on the boat for home. But you can take it from me, Jeff Robinson, I would not be surprised if the next costume you get into would be a striped suit!"

CHAPTER XXXIV

KARMANIA HAS HER WATERWAYS AND CROSSDALE A RENDEZVOUS

April saw the tunnel and the railway completed as far as Roda, and Crossdale was free to leave Karmania, with its traditions, its seditions, its beauty, the perfect setting that it made for the one woman in the world.

The news of the opening of the Royal State Railway spread the country around. From the hill hamlets and from the plain cities peasants arrived on foot, on mule back, in oxcarts—pilgrims to worship at Crossdale's modern shrine. They camped on the plains, spent nights on the road, and trooped to the capital to stare at the mechanical toys that the western world had manufactured for them and to gaze spellbound at the mouth of the tunnel as it opened towards Cye.

The railway would be soon ready to carry products of the country westward, and the waterway opened to Karmania at last. When the waste had been removed and the ends of the rails bitten into each other and clicked, and the track cleared, the Prime Minister gave orders to prepare a gala train to transport the members of the court and the Queen to a formal opening at Roda. There would be a great banquet at Las Restaurus, at which Crossdale would be the guest of honor.

But, as Crossdale knew and the Prime Minister knew, every man on his staff knew, things were not good in the Kingdom, not good at all. Unrest had culminated; there was constant warfare between the royal troops and Sarvanarof's brigands. No week passed without more or less decisive battles. Sarvanarof's forces were being fed from the Russian border. Public buildings had been blown up in Pratz-Zenoe, hostages taken, plots discovered throughout the country to abduct the Queen. And it had not been without great hesitation that Karol finally decided to permit any demonstration regarding the opening of the road. It had been voted in Parliament, however, that such a demonstration, with the presence of the Queen and the Ministers, would be salutary.

Although workmen had been on strike throughout Karmania, not a man had ever knocked off work on the railroad, where everything seemed under special protection. Nothing had hindered the building of the road since Crossdale had taken it in hand.

He had written to the Queen. He wrote in English and Karmanian. He was deeply, passionately in love, and he told her so, forgetting that she was a Queen. He sent a letter to her by Serga at an unearthly hour in the morning to the palace. After it had gone, he suffered and cursed and swore and kicked himself for an ass, and was happy about it and glad of it all day.

At night, at another unearthly hour, the Queen's messenger brought him an answer. No woman in San Francisco would have sent an answer like that to her lover! In a big, creamy looking envelope, stamped with green wax, was a

filmy, perfumed veil, caught by a golden tape. He knew that it was the veil which he had taken from her face at the *whirra*. He slept with it in his palm, pressed against his lips.

Her wordless answer to him inspired mad and wonderful letters from his heart and senses. Crossdale in these revealed himself to this woman almost unknown to him in a way he could never have done by spoken word. She had enchained his mind and his soul. He had responses from her, responses, but not letters. The yellow leaves of a fresh rose, scattered in an envelope; a verse from the song he knew so well. With these golden communications between himself and the castle he was obliged to exist until the opening of the State Railway.

Jeff Robinson had disappeared completely about a week before and as soon as communications were established between Cyé and Savia the circus went to Roda, and Crossdale amused himself by watching the defile of the picturesque paraphernalia of the circus—animal cages, the circus people, the brass band, roaring and in great form, until its noise was drowned by the tunnel. Above the clamor and the "*Heljens!*" Crossdale imagined that he could distinguish the strains of "Mr. Rat," but he was probably mistaken.

As he watched the barbaric show go by and realized that this was the first thing to take road by his tunnel, he was vastly amused. San Francisco and Caleb Storm—what would they have thought of it all?

A week later his *train-de-luxe* lined up—second best to the circus, if the circus had anything on it at all! Out of

the electric engine the Tartar driver leaned, in his bright blue shirt and tarbush. He was smoking a five-inch cigar. The engine was invisible for the green and white bunting, the Queen's colors, and the flower wreaths and garlands that decorated it.

Then followed the improvised passenger coaches, open cars with green velvet seats, hung with flags—bunches of the Karmanian flag, green and white striped, with a black wolf in the corner, symbolic of Rome and the Steppes—eight little coaches, ready to transport the pick of the court to the first station on the road, little Roda, with ten thousand inhabitants, etc.

Over the plain, like a sea on either side, swarmed the proper proportion of the populace for an event of this kind—swarmed enough of them to warrant the Royal Police and the Royal Guard to cordon them off. But the crowd was not enthusiastic as he had seen it in Karmania, and he felt it. It was a silent, curious crowd, interested in the tunnel, in the railroad, but not in the Government. It would not have been possible to have thought otherwise. The crowd was cordoned off, but Crossdale could see that there was a good understanding between the people and the military. The "*Heljens!*" were weak, and only when he heard them shouting "*Ameriquinous viva!*" did their hearts seem to be in their voices.

In tarbushes and stiff white skirts, floating veils, dark, swarthy faces, the women and children in holiday dress, taken from family chests or fresh from the embroiderer's loom, they might have stepped out from the Karmanian museum of antique costume.

He wondered as he watched the people come and go and press and crowd and surge toward the guards along the road, what would happen to the Queen if the revolutionaries were successful? Would it free her? Would she then be a private individual? If the monarchy held on would Karol give him his walking papers, or could he remain? There were the oil wells to interest him.

He thought this all out in detail as he stood down near the little grand stand. He could not bear to be seen staring down the road where she should come. On the other hand, he did not want to miss the impression when she did come. So he pulled his short moustache, gave the wrong answers to O'Dell's questions and stared at his tunnel, whose arch was completely garlanded with decorations and flowers; and over the top was a mighty blazon with the Queen's arms and the colors of the Queen. Within he could see the electric lights, green and white, white and green, tapering away. Around the mouth of the tunnel were grouped corps of the Queen's Guard in full-dress uniform, riding their Cossack stallions.

As the band of the Royal Guards struck up the Karmanian national hymn, he saw six victorias, drawn by gray Ukraine horses, each horse ridden by postilions, come fretting along in truly royal manner, and the guests disembarked from these ancient wheel ships at the "band stand" as Crossdale mentally called it. He saw them go up and take their places—Queen Karmen Mara and some twenty ministers and officials in uniform and civilian dress. The stand was full and Crossdale, whose place was there, had been too transfixed by the sight of her to move.

Prince Karol began immediately to make a formal address, flowery and voluble, accompanied by suave gesture; he adjured the people to be loyal to their Sovereign. But presumably the master of ceremonies did not deem the moment propitious for such adjurations, for the band broke into music and drowned the Prime Minister's speech with its trumpets.

Then Crossdale found himself standing between the Queen of Karmania and her Prime Minister and asking: "What shall I say to them, your Majesty?" He heard her murmur: "Oh, one can always say 'God bless you' and some little human message."

Crossdale stood out like a man at the platform rail, smashed his hand down on the flowers and hit a couple of thorns through the roses, and gripped them until his palm bled. He started off in a fine clear voice, in honest Karmanian. And he will never forget it, until he is a man of eighty, in far San Francisco or any good old American town—he will never forget it.

He said: "God save the Queen!" and then he said: "*Heljen!*" And the response that this effected told him that he had spoken well. And he called out to them collectively: "*Skarervaro batuchi!*" and smiled his Irish, humorous smile, and he was young and strong and good looking and happy and in love, and had finished their tunnel for them; he was popular, and they laughed and shouted and treated him as a popular speaker should be treated before he leaves the platform.

Then she went forward to the rail. He heard her voice in its delicious tones and in the gracious words of her language.

She smiled on her people; extended her hands to them. And his eyes blurred and his face grew hot; and he wished he might have been a little boy to have cried without shame. And it made him wild and furious to see that they did not respond as he could have wished, although they warmed to her more than they would have done had she not followed his little speech.

Afterwards they were borne off, some thirty of them or more, in the special train; the little cars went bumping and humping and cogging along on the narrow gauge road into his tunnel, through Mount Nepta.

Princess Mariska was not here for the opening of the State Railroad. She had been gone from the kingdom ever since Korvan's imprisonment; you heard of her in Paris, in London.

The Prime Minister asked many questions of Crossdale regarding the scientific operations of the excavations. The Queen was silent. Finally they saw the daylight; the arch grew larger and larger, and Cyé and Roda waited for them, waited to greet them as Savia had greeted them. The Syndic of Cyé, with the usual accompaniment of homely little girls with bouquets of flowers surged up to the Queen's car. They were surrounded by the committee of welcome.

Queen Karmen Mara leaned down over the car to the little girl who handed her an immense bouquet of heartsease. She said to Crossdale: "Hold my flowers for me a moment, will you, while I kiss this little girl?"

And as the American took the bouquet he took with it something that was unmistakably a letter, and understood it was for him. He transferred it to his pocket.

But for him the glory of the day was gone—from Cye to Roda, from Roda back to the hunting lodge, where a banquet in the form of a high tea was prepared for them at four o'clock, it all became the usual tiresome boring business of a popular festivity. The speeches, the music, were an unspeakable bore.

Two things, however, were real. As Karol and Crossdale and the assembled party refreshed themselves under the trees at Roda, a red carpet was spread down on the ground and four acrobats from the circus treated them to some very good wrestling, and in one fashion or another a message found its way into Crossdale's hand, as the Queen's had found its way there. It was from Jeff.

"Boss, look out for to be in your own cabin tonight at Cye. I will be there to meet you before dawn tomorrow. Don't you miss me, Boss—it's life or death."

Crossdale turned the letter over, musing. He would go; he would certainly be there to meet this man and reckon with him. He did not know that nothing on earth could have made him meet this appointment or any other, but he found it out when he read the Queen's letter that afternoon, in his old room at the lodge, Las Restaurus, when he went in to make a toilette before the banquet.

"I have gone back to the capital in order that you may meet me. You can build roads; you can find your way back over them. I will be in your tower at eight tonight, waiting until you come."

CHAPTER XXXV

"HELJEN: THE QUEEN"

Throughout that evening, during the feast, he could think of nothing but the fact that he was going to see her again, and soon. He knew now why he had come to Savia, why Storm had dug him out of his isolation; he knew why he had been spared death a dozen times in his life—in order that he might live for once like this. The wonderful part of it all was that she wanted it in this way, that it was her gracious and heavenly idea! He could have kissed the hem of her dress in adoration of her goodness. She was a queen—true enough. A million times and far away better than anything else she was a woman.

The hunt dining room at Las Restaurus had never looked more beautiful. Although it was still daylight, in order to create a false darkness for the banquet, the room was all shut in and brilliantly lighted. The customary service of highly polished pewter was used, and rare flowers had been imported for the occasion, and the fruit dishes, even in springtime, were stacked high with forced fruits—strawberries, peaches, nectarines, all from the royal greenhouses. The wines, the smoke of the cigars and cigarettes, the laughter and the high spirit of satisfaction that prevailed with these men, gathered to celebrate the opening of the railroad, made an atmosphere that seemed to palpitate

around Crossdale and to create a penumbra for his mental and sentimental excitement.

The cabinet ministers, men high in the army—in short, every one whom the Prime Minister wished to honor, were present at the feast and the American wondered how much they understood of the really rotten condition of the kingdom, of the danger threatening the present government. He glanced around at the serene faced officials who seemed to him smug and contented with themselves and the time. He did not believe they could ever gather up the ravelling threads of royalty; the tapestry of old custom and tradition, Stephen felt sure now, could not hold together much longer.

As he looked from face to face, he thought of the head of the revolutionaries, as he had seen him last at Jehanospelz, lying bandaged on his couch, vibrant, strong, alive with ideals of freedom. Prince John seemed the coming man to the American, and amongst those present no one was equal to Sarvanarof in bearing and in presence. Prince John's promise to appear at this time to celebrate the opening of the railroad came back to his mind vividly. It seemed a challenge from the republican. Would he keep his word?

During the past months he had heard much of the disturbances throughout Karmania. He was thinking of all this when the Minister of War, Count Fan Streloa, leaned over to speak to Prince Karol, including the engineer in his gesture that commanded attention.

"Before we lose ourselves, your Excellency," he said, with a smile, as though he anticipated the loss that it was going to be as far as he was concerned, "before we forget ourselves in the exhilaration of tonight, I wish to recall to

your mind the measures I have taken to ensure tranquility," with a slight and deprecatory gesture, "and as your Excellency knows, for the moment all I can promise to do. Presumably from Roumania Prince John has enlarged his forces. Yesterday there was a very vigorous skirmish on the plains south of Jehanospelz, to our advantage, and I have stationed fifteen hundred men and more along the line to the west. I think there is not the slightest danger that he will advance with his brigands for the present. Yesterday's whipping was a sound one. He lost at least a hundred and fifty men."

Every one present listened intently, but the Prime Minister was calm, and he seemed so thoroughly to understand the situation and so ready to "lose himself" as he lifted to his lips his brilliantly polished pewter goblet, that the others, with a sigh, settled back to their enjoyment. Prince Karol's face was grave.

"Long live the Monarchy!" he cried, and rose, the table rising with him, *en masse*. "Long live the Queen!"

And with this the "*Heljens!*" were all unchained and ran from one guest to another. Crossdale had never heard such enthusiasm, never heard her name cried out with such ardor. And as he too hailed her, with so many blended feelings in his heart, he did not know that never again would he hear this cry raised for Karmen Mara, that it was the last he should ever hear in Karmania.

The Minister's short, perfunctory speech which followed made little impression.

The air was surcharged with foreboding, however, to Crossdale. He was confident that there was a crisis at hand.

A banquet in Karmania is no light matter. The court had waited for this celebration for many months. It was a national event. Tonight it was positively nauseous to Crossdale to see them gorge, for gorge they did. He was a man about to enter paradise, and vulgar feasting meant nothing to him; and he would not have touched a drop of alcohol for anything in the world. He knew that he must keep his brain clear in order properly to execute his *sortie*. He did not care to study his companions and feasters, but the room in which they sat seemed to him very delightful and attractive tonight, blazing with light, glowing with color, and the majestic heads of the children of the forest, put out of existence by man's selfish love of sport—stag, deer, wolf, bear—looked gravely down on the hunters through the candles' glory and through the smoke.

The Prime Minister was in full dress uniform, of white broadcloth and tunic covered with silver brandebourgs and decorations. His close little beard shone like a silver beard, and his fine, flexible hand caressed it from time to time. But tonight he was very grave, and now and then he leaned over and spoke in an undertone to the Minister of War, whom he had placed on his left hand. He seemed, now that the American had completed his work, to entirely forget him. But this difference meant little to the young man, who asked nothing better. Lifted up as he was by the wings of desire and passion, he had nothing to do with his fellow-men. It seemed to him that the feast would never, never progress, as he waited for these men to fall under the influence of their wine. Their brains must be clouded before he could venture to leave the feast. He was guest of honor

and though already no longer an object of interest, he must be sure that his absence would not be observed.

He had no intention of leaving the house by the front entrance, where the servants, guards, *treja* drivers and a crowd of retainers and soldiers were stationed for a mile along the road. But Crossdale had not spent six months in Cyé and its environs without knowing the forest path, and he knew that he could find his way. Impatient, restless, he thought to himself: "God, if I miss this happiness—well, there won't be anything left in life to me worth a candle."

In the winter garden the court orchestra was playing the folk songs and martial airs, and the music alone seemed friendly and intimate, to understand his mood and his excitement. He heard the Queen's songs and the pretty dance tune to which he had danced at Heidi-Luc, when she had thrown herself upon his breast. Nothing in the world could have come to him more delightfully than this barbaric eager music, which stimulated him and inspired him. He must go!

Now that the railroad was opened, the Minister of Commerce was saying, they would begin immediately to cut timber and rush it through to Austria and beyond. Desecration, Crossdale thought. All the forests around this lodge should be sacred. He had kissed her under those pines and cedars for the first time! Those pink-trunked trees had seen the first of his bliss! No axe should ever touch them if he could have his way.

Even if he should find a *treja* ready, or a horse, it would take him two hours to reach Cyé, and after that an hour or more to go through the tunnel. If he did not find a hand

car which he could manœuvre himself, he would have to walk, over refuse and debris and through the mud; but he knew every foot of the way. Had he not made it? Go through he would, if he had to crawl.

They were beginning their series of toasts and gave "The Queen" again, and it took several seconds for the echoes to subside. On fire, trembling, no one knew how the toast appealed to this stranger. Crossdale cried out "*Heljen!*" with the others.

What would Prince Karol, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, all of them, the grave old Johnnies, beginning already to feel their wine, what would they say if they knew that in a few hours the Queen of Karmania would be in his arms? Personally he felt so set apart from them, so surrounded by some sort of magic enchantment, that he could hardly believe he was in the flesh.

When they had remembered him sufficiently to lift their glasses and give "Mr. Crossdale," and this too had died away in silence, he felt that his time was coming. After a few seconds, when they were all engaged in discussions in little twos and threes, red faced, and the wine was flowing like blood and sunlight, he pushed his chair gently from the table and how he could never have told—in a few seconds found himself in the corridor. The soft radiance of the daylight smote him gently, but it was cold and pale after the unreal glare of the surcharged room.

Stephen stretched his arms wide, thanking high heaven for his release. He rushed into his little sitting room, where his things were waiting, took his cap and stick and a pocketful of cigarettes, felt—as he had a way of doing in

Karmania—for his hip pocket, and what he wanted was there; and without being observed or challenged by any one, he found himself out in the weeded paths leading down to the stables. He did not need to go all the way down to the dependencies, full now of servants carousing and of the *trejas* which had brought in some hundred guests, for in order to make room for the others, tethered to a little barricade, were two or three of the Queen's *treja* horses, little stallions, tied far enough apart from each other to be safe. They were bridle-less and innocent of any saddle, but this was what the American preferred in the way of transportation. It would awaken no interest; it could tell no tales.

He stroked the soft nose of the little beast nearest him; he caressed the satiny neck; then bent down and whispered into the silken ear the Karmanian term of endearment of a beloved horse: "*Mas jelona*—my little bird."

He loosened the stallion. Riding such as this was like native air to him. In a few moments he had flung his leg across the bare back of the beast, clinging to him as he reared and plunged.

There had been during the work on the railroad a timber trail cut from Cye to the Queen's lodge. New dependencies and buildings had been planned by the Queen for her forest house, and, too, they had been cutting timber and carrying it by ox and mule cart along this rough trail. But Crossdale knew it well. It was rough going, but a perfectly possible way for a horse to take. This path he found and for two hours rode through the pale spring night, not meeting a creature or disturbed by any human element between the lodge and the village.

As he rode the owls called to him and asked him who he was and whom he loved; and Crossdale laughed out to them as he rode on his beautiful adventure. The night hawks circled low down, close to his head as he rode, flying like a primitive man, clinging close to the back of his mad little stallion. Once or twice he thought he heard in the far distance the bay, the melancholy cry of the wolf mother, already fecund, and calling forth into the night her exultation in the fulfillment of her destiny.

And the young Californian thought as he rode: If this is the most mad and unwise thing in my life; if it is going to bring me anguish and sorrow later; if I die for it—in spite of all I am glad! "*Heljen!*" he murmured close to the ear of the little stallion.

And it was well after nightfall when he saw the furtive sparks, the little lights of sleepy Cye.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE CUP AT THE LIPS

It was midnight before he saw his tower rising like a brown lily on the plain and heard from the belfry twelve sonorous peals. In that part of the castle where was the belfry were the royal prisons, set apart for political suspects. Prince John and Prince Sarvan had both been held there, until the Queen's generosity had set them free to plot against her afresh.

He made his way by meadow paths across the spring fields to his slender tower, rising black in the fair night. There was no light to indicate that any one watched for him within. The plains, peaceful and pastoral, slept under the starlit sky. The scene suggested only peace. And the jewel city of little Savia rested tranquilly on its hill, a deepset light burning here and there.

He had come stealing through the sleeping town of Cye like a thief, on foot, setting his stallion free at the edge of the forest. He had struck it once on the flank and the little creature had charged back across the forest road in the direction of Las Restaurus. Whether the stallion ever munched the grass with his fellows again Crossdale never knew.

He had been obliged to pass by his own little office at the railroad yards, and to his surprise he saw a light burning.

He wondered who was there, and for what purpose? That, too, he never knew, for he did not go to see. Nothing in the world could have delayed him or kept him from forging ahead toward the other end of the Nepta tunnel.

It struck him even then curiously that there was not a guard in sight, not a man, not a creature. The little train on which they had come through that day stood side-tracked. Even the lights, burning always, white and green, in the tunnel, were out. The place was in total darkness; there was not a light switched on. What could it mean?

To have gone to the electric plant to have informed himself would have taken time. He made his way to the entrance of the tunnel, prepared to walk through, when he saw standing on the track a hand car, the same type of little dummy-car on which he had ridden to Roda with the Queen. This should be his carriage.

He sprang on it, started the brakes, when, at the entrance of the tunnel, just as he was about to plunge into the total darkness of the mountain way which his science and skill had opened, he was seized around the waist by a man's strong arms and in Karmanian some one said to him: "Give the countersign."

But the guard had seized the wrong man, the wrong man for him. He caught Crossdale round the waist, but he had left the young man's arms free. In another moment the American had freed himself by striking the man's chin up, almost breaking his neck. Whether he did so or not he never knew. The man fell back, tumbled, and Crossdale ran after his car, which had continued its voyage some few yards into the tunnel.

He heard a shot fired, but it was not until he was well along, and he felt the blood, that he realized that he had been hit. The wound was slight. He sucked it, took his handkerchief and bound it up as well as he could. It was nothing—a scratch. And he had been able to hike his way through, to pump his way through, to drive his little dummy-car from one end of the tunnel to the other with no further adventure. When he had thrown himself off, leaving his car on the rails at the tunnel's mouth, within a few hundred yards of his tower, he was dripping with perspiration, dirty, panting, bloody, and like this he ran to her.

Alongside his eagerness to see the Queen ran his terrible anxiety for her future and her safety. The country was on the verge of revolution, passionate, stormy—he would not have been surprised at any moment to hear the bells from those belfries ring the tocsin. Even now the vibrant notes of midnight, whose pulsations seemed unwilling to die on the evening air, were ominous to him.

His tower was deserted. But Queen Karmen Mara had royally commandeered it for tonight for their wonderful adventure and she would find a way to enter and leave in secrecy. Was she not the Queen?

He opened with his key and pushed in the deepset, iron-nailed door on to darkness. Nothing betrayed light in the ancient mouldy shell, and he crept cautiously up the winding stairway, feeling his way in the dark.

At the top of the stairs under his door a golden line of light lay along the floor like a thread dropped from the web of romance. He pushed the door in, his heart pounding hard against his side—soiled, dusty with travel, his injured

hand bound with his handkerchief, now stained with blood, hatless—a pilgrim of love at the shrine at last, and stood looking into the room.

The Queen of Karmania had cleared his table to cover it with a gold woven tapestry cloth. On this she had spread a little feast in silver dishes: wine, a cold bird, bright peaches like suns. In the same kind of dress the women of her people who in their passion throw themselves upon their lover's breasts have been used to wear for hundreds of years, she sat swinging one high-heeled red-shod foot. Smoking a cigarette, her cheeks carmine, her eyes shadow and fire, she watched the door.

Karmen Mara had done a mad thing and she knew it, and liked it none the less for this. Life had been created for her hitherto by others; less than most people she had made her fate. Taken from the people to satisfy the caprice of a selfish man, she had been forced to follow the groove for which she had not been originally intended. Now for once in her life she determined to have her way. Come what would, cost her what it might, she had calmly decided to take for herself out of life its greatest treasure.

She did not move as the American came in, remaining as she was, one hand on her hip, the other holding the cigarette to her lips, calling out to him across the room in her rich voice: "*Skarervaro batucho!* Stranger, rider, welcome! Welcome!" Then exclaimed tenderly, leaning forward and staring at him: "But you're hurt! You're hurt!"

The stranger who had come from far, who had asked none of the glory of the kingdom, nothing but love, had his apotheosis then. Swung up to the highest pinnacle of sensa-

tion and, as at one time or another all climbers feel, he was sure that he had made an ascension never reached by anyone before. He went over to her where she sat on the table, and put his arms round her. He held her closely, but kept his bloody hand away that it might not stain her white bodice and said: "Oh, no, not hurt—healed."

No love story since Eden tells so well as the Book of Genesis the incident and the adventure of love. "Adam fell into a deep sleep." The mystery of the woman, the mystery of mating, is only a dream.

As he looked back at that dazzling time, it always seemed to Crossdale a vision, unique, transcendent, and above everything else intangible.

Close to the fireplace, before the table, ran a deepset sofa, covered with old green velour. Crossdale broke his dream with a sigh, both her hands in his well hand, the light on his face and brow which transfigures a man in a woman's eyes. His left hand bound in a napkin, part of the royal linen chest, of damask-like satin. She had bathed his hand. The operation had taken long, although the wound was deep.

He told her from beginning to end what he knew of the revolutionary forces, speaking rapidly, intensely; of Jehanospelz, Prince John; he said he believed in Prince John's lucky star. He spared her nothing, looking at her intently. She sat close to him, listening, half-defiant, wholly attentive, and more than sceptical.

He dwelt upon the unrest throughout the country; what he knew of the activity of Prince John's spies. And then he told her of the impression made upon them all by the speech of the Minister for War.

"I may be wrong," he said. "Years of your peaceful government may prove me an alarmist. But I think the time is ripe. I would not be surprised if the blow fell at any moment. And," he said, looking at her fixedly, "if it does, if this republican chief becomes the President of Karmania, what will happen to you?"

Karmen Mara shook off everything he said as though it were a bad dream. She put both her hands on his shoulders, looked into his eyes. She could have made him forget everything in the world, but he would not let her and returned her look steadily, earnestly.

"You must think of it," he said, "you must think of it. You must be ready."

He lifted both her hands from his shoulders and held them tightly. "Now," he said, "so much for Karmania and its transformations. After all, your country is only following in the line of the others. It's progress, and no one can help it. But I don't want you part of these transformations. I come from a big democracy; there are few puppets with us, or marionettes. We are simply a people of one class really from coast to coast. You are not royal; there is not a drop of royal blood in your veins any more than there is in mine. You come from the people; you were born free. Why, in God's name, shouldn't you return to freedom? My coming tonight," he continued, with great charm of simplicity and frankness, "looks like a big adventure, like the wild recklessness of a man in love with a woman, no matter what she is, no matter what he is. I am not a prince of the blood, but I am able to offer you quite a little kingdom in my own country." He smiled. "Hundreds of acres of rich,

yielding land, a fortune, everything an honest man can give to his wife." He stopped. He saw her pale. "I want to protect you, to care for you, and after all, it is only a man's right, isn't it, to ask the woman he cares for to come with him, to follow him?"

Now she drew her hands away from him, and he let her go, watching her; he saw a shadow fall across her face and she said abruptly:

"What a dear you are, Stephen Crossdale! So American and so sweet! Why, you talk as though you could make dreams come true! Even if there should be trouble in my country, do you think I would leave my people and go away?"

In the light of the candles, the brown old room's glow and shadows round her, big-eyed, bright-cheeked, graceful and adorable in her peasant dress, she might have been a girl in masquerade. The whole thing seemed unreal but her eyes and her lips and the touch of her.

"Ah, but when Prince John is President of Karmania they won't be your people, you will owe them nothing." He threw his arm around her shoulders, drew her to him and kissed her many times.

"Shake this crumbling old dust from your feet and go—or rather, come, my dear."

Karmen Mara sprang up. She changed with wonderful rapidity from the woman to the Queen, and in a second she seemed cruelly removed from him, as though a gulf were fixed between them. She played with the heavy stuff of the cloth on the table at her side; hard and heavy it lay between her finger tips. On the table were the remains of their dis-

turbed feast—a little wine in the glasses, the pips and the skins of the delicious peaches. He watched her. She was pale, her lips trembled. She was not hesitating; she was wondering how to tell him.

"I am not frightened in the least, of what you tell me of the disturbances in Karmania," she said. "A Queen is not supposed to have ordinary emotions. Before I go on, before I say what I am going to say, you must believe that I care for you." He would have rushed to her; but she held him back.

"Please let me speak! When the King took me from the people and made me Queen of Karmania, he gave me a royal gift which, unless they tear it from me, I shall never lay down." With a fine lifting of her head she said: "Certainly never from fear," and added, "not even for love."

A great anguish seized him. His madness and folly, what this would mean to him later, rushed over him. He had put his soul in this woman and leaving her for ever would mean spiritual and mental death to him. But he said, with laudable control: "Then it is merely the old story of a man who loved a Queen? Romance is full of such folly, but when it comes to one's self, reading story books does not make it any easier to bear." He asked her with great simplicity: "What do you want me to do?"

"Ah," she said, drawing a breath that seemed like a breath of relief, "I want you to go of your own free will, before you are thrust out of the Kingdom by the Prime Minister's command. You don't know Prince Karol; he is *intrigant*, very subtle. Your passports are already signed. Now that you have accomplished what he wanted you to do,

he has no further use for you. Promise me that you will understand, in the name of tonight, promise me you will go as soon as you can."

"No," he said quietly, "I will not go and leave you to the mercy of events."

"You must," she said. "You have no choice in the matter. If I had not known that you would be out of Karmania in the next few hours I should never have let you come tonight. Can't you understand? This is something that has been snatched by us both. You must go!"

Infuriated at his own impotence with what he saw was fate, he cried: "You dismiss me as you would a valet!"

And Karmen Mara blazed out at him: "You have no right, no right!"

He caught her to him again, holding her until it seemed as though there were only one of them in the shadow. Before—for she seemed to yield, she seemed to return into the circle of his embrace and magnetism—before he could urge anything more upon her, or formulate his fears and his dread of Prince John, the first sound that had broken the isolation or the silence around them, made them both start.

"Listen!" she said "Listen!—It is the changing of the guard at the castle. It is their bugle. I must go—it is nearly morning. What if they should find me here? It would mean your ruin! Help me to get out of your window, the window of your bedroom, the way I came in."

She snatched up from the sofa, where they had been sitting, a long black cloth cape, such as the peasant women wear on Sundays, buckled the big silver buckle. She drew its hood over her head and, wrapping it round her, fled from

the studio through his bedroom, and he helped her out of the open window, on to the little winding outside staircase, concealed by the thick old ivy vines, a way of descent only to be made by some one who knew it well.

He did not attempt to follow her, understanding too well what it would mean to her to be found there with him. But he watched her dark slender figure, with peaked hood, like a fairy cape, descend the winding staircase until it was lost in the darkness of the vines and the night.

CHAPTER XXXVII

ZITO'S BLOOD TOKEN

When she had gone, he threw himself down before the table, and with his head on his arms gave himself up to a moment of impotent despair. He could have raged, he could have wept. He wanted to fight the fates, to tear the web of circumstance apart and find an every day man's solution to the problem of his life. But his moment of self-absorption and of rebellion was short, cut in twain by a sharp silver sound, the crying of a bugle, a long bright call, and an answer.

He sprang to his feet. The first notes came from the direction of his tunnel, and the answer from the *enceinte* of the city. These were the signals he had been mentally harkening for, the response to his question as to where were the forces of John Sarvanarof.

There was a sound of the clattering of steps upon the stairs. His door was struck in and a motley looking figure fell into the room. Crossdale half caught him in his arms, and Jeff Robinson sank down at his feet—Jeff, almost unrecognizable, hatless, covered with mud and dirt, a pitiable object.

The negro lifted his face to his master, pallid in his excitement, and his outstretched hands trembled as he held them

up in supplication. It was like an anti-civil war picture of a slave asking for mercy from a brutal overseer.

“Boss, why didn’t yo’ go to de cabin, like ah tol’ yo’ to? Ah waited dere fo’ yo’ all night long. Ah could ’a got yo’ clear away from Cyé, Boss! Ah had it all fixed up. Fo de lub o’ Gawd—”

“Come,” said his master, sternly, “get up! Pull yourself together.” He tried to draw the man to his feet, but the negro crumpled like a rag, clinging to Crossdale’s knees.

Now here was a thing on which he could wreck his distress and his wretchedness, and a man at bay always looks for an outlet. He could have struck the man as he knelt, and lifted his hand.

“Kill me!” said the negro. “Yo’ couldn’t kill me enough! Only listen! Yo’ got to git out ob hyar, Mister Crossdale, somehow or udder, double quick!”

Crossdale forcibly drew him to his feet. He half flung him on the sofa. He could not bear to look at him, and yet something in the creature was so appealing, so pathetic, so helpless, that it cooled his rage. He poured out a glass of wine and gave it to the negro. “Drink this.”

With his teeth chattering at the edge of the glass, Jeff blubbered out: “Boss, dey sayde ef ah’d gine dem an’ keep dem posted on li’le odd jobs dey wanted, dey would come up gran’ at de en’, boss. Dey’re a fat line ob hawgs! Dat’s what dey is! Dey’s de meanes’ bunch ob spo’ts ah ebber see. But it’s too late.”

Bending above him, half inclined to shoot him as he sat there, gurgling and trying to exculpate himself, Crossdale said: “Don’t talk to me about any one else but yourself!

You scoundrel, you fool! You have spied on me for them, have you? You're not fit to shoot!"

"Boss," said the man, clasping his hands, "yo' dunno what I done it fo'."

"I don't know where to kick you to—if I did, you wouldn't know at what speed you were traveling."

"Dey sayde," he heard the negro murmur, "dat ef ah'd stan' by dem 'twill t'night, dey'd make yo' Presiden' ob de New Republic."

The negro's idiocy, his weakness, his miserable bedraggled condition, spoke for him to Crossdale's compassion stronger than his words. He was a miserable fool, a poor tool, but he was an American citizen and in a way he belonged to him. He knew the negro type so well. In a flash he understood how the others had played upon his vanity and his love of display. He saw how the man was dressed, in the uniform of Prince John's soldiers. He had some kind of ridiculous decoration on his chest. They had tricked him out, laughed at him, made fun of him, but used him all the while. More than that, they had kept him away from his master for their own reasons.

"President of the New Republic!" His master laughed harshly. "Gosh, you're a poor nut!"

"Boss, I done crawled tru' de tunnel on ma belly to git t' yo' t'night! I swum de ditch! I foun' a gyard midway who di'n't want to let ma by, an' sure to Gawd he's drinkin' up de dirty water as he lies. Ah sure had to come t' yo', Boss."

"All right. Now that you have got that wine inside you, get up. What's your idea, if you have any, for pulling out

of here? But you are a damned tool of Sarvanarof—I wouldn't trust you to lead me to a church."

"No, no," cried the negro. "Yo' knows ah ain' a skunk, yo' knows ah only did it fo' yo', Boss! You'se done de fines' man in de world an' ah wanted to see yo' way up!"

His master looked round the room. He would not be taken alive if they were going to take him like a rat in a trap, and as he glanced about to see what point he could make a vantage of, the negro caught his arm. "Hark!"

And now they could distinguish the sound of many voices, cries and calls, and the advancing hoofs of horses beating on the road leading to the town. Over and over again now to them came from a thousand throats what Crossdale had been waiting for for days, for months. "*Sava, sava, Jehannos! Sava Jehanos!*"

He threw open the blind of the eastward window. Over the plains the dawn was coming now, white and rose-hemmed. On its hill Savia, cold and dark, lightless, erect, rose solemn and toneless in the gray light. It fronted the cries, it fronted the advancing troops of the rebel army as the little hill city had done in the ancient days when the hordes of barbaric invaders had broken the Roman sway.

As he looked up to the castle he saw the proud flag, which fluttered always from the tower where the Queen's apartments were when she was at home, hauled down. It fell, fluttering, ruffling—but it fell. And he saw the plains below the city walls black with soldiers. The Queen's Guard, the Royal Fusiliers—all ready to meet their brothers in arms, and to amalgamate in one big army of rebellion against the monarchy.

From belfry to belfry the bells began to call and answer. Over the crashing and the jangling and the pealing the hour of four rang out from one big bell. This was the tocsin at last! Now he heard it, as he had expected to hear it, sounding the retreat for the monarchical rule.

He went over to the other window, commanding the road to the tunnel, and in the early light saw troops belching forth like shot from the mouth of a cannon. They scattered over the plain; they swarmed; they seemed indeed to be a harvest of dragons' teeth.

And the Queen, Karmen Mara, the woman he loved?

Blind fury caught him like a beast at the throat. He caught up his pistol and would have shot the negro like a rat then, but as he turned from the window to do this, found himself alone. The man had gone.

He tore open his bedroom door, calling: "Jeff."

The man had probably made his way out of the window through which the Queen had disappeared. Crossdale put his pistol back in his pocket. Fly! Where to? Where could he go like this? What would he fly to?

After all, what had he to fear? He was an American citizen. He had meddled in no political intrigue; he was not seditious; he had no politics. Meddled! He had done something far more vital than this—he had been the lover of the Queen.

He was no longer simply a private person of absolutely no interest. He had played a role, and the man to whom this role would be a matter of importance was the leader of the revolutionary movement, Prince John himself, the man who, he had so often been told, loved the Queen of Karmania.

He looked about the little tower room—at the table, with its marvellous cloth, the glasses, the plates—spectacular in the pale light of dawn.

Under the table on the floor a tiny pocket handkerchief lay, like a filmy web. He caught it up—it smelt of jasmine. He thrust it in his pocket; it was something of her for him to take away.

He had just done this when the door burst open and two soldiers, in command of Captain Zito, came into the room. Zito saluted him, with a curious smile of triumph.

"Excellency," he said, "I have come. You see, I have not forgotten. I have my friends with me. You will follow us."

Crossdale determined then and there that he would not follow this man, not if he had to go down to the grave with murder on his soul. He cast his eyes once more about the room. His bedroom door was open.

But what was the use of flying from them? He leaned on the table, with his hands back of him, his feet crossed.

"Follow you? To where, and by whose orders?"

Zito, without replying directly, nodded. "Do you hear them, Excellency?"

Crossdale heard them. It would have been difficult not to. The air without was vibrating with the huzzas and the cries and that impressive sound of men half mad, cheering an idea.

"The Prince is without," Zito announced with triumph. "Las Preysidentanos is without, marching to the capital. The welcome there will be royal for him."

"God!" Crossdale ejaculated between his teeth, thinking of her.

"I asked His Excellency for this great honor," the Karmanian continued, "the reward of taking the American engineer prisoner. I have never forgotten you, and our blood sign."

Crossdale played for time. "I see you were at the right table, Zito—you have the winning cards."

The man nodded back to the little window behind him. "They have won, the great Republicans!"

It made Crossdale sick to think of shooting this man without warning, but he was not going to be taken like a rat in a trap without a fight. Behind him his hand was over his pistol in his hip pocket.

"It was a great, great sight," said the Karmanian, "at the lodge, Las Restaurus, the place where all those aristocrats killed the defenceless beasts," he chortled in his throat. "Excellency, Lord, I was with the surrounding party."

("Are they all dead?" Crossdale wondered. "What has happened to them?")

But he did not ask. He was holding the little rotund figure of the Karmanian in his vision; nothing that Zito did escaped him. The man was very, very drunk; twice he took a backward step and his men sustained him.

"We have been following you, Excellency, Lord, all these months. At Jehanospelz the President has laughed at your adventures and your victories. But they will have an end, they will have an end, and tonight is the end!" He made a step toward Crossdale, with a hiccough. "Now," he managed to get out, "it is the turn of the President of the New Republic with the Queen!"

"Beast!" ejaculated the American, and as the man, not

too drunk to see his movement of hand, drew his own gun, Crossdale shot him through the heart. Zito fell as he stood.

Then the two soldiers loomed up a hundred feet high to Stephen. As Zito fell he turned his gun on them. The bigger fellow, lurching forward, struck him with the butt of his little gun, but Crossdale caught only half the blow, and smashed the gun out of the man's hand, and it fell crashing against the wall. But he had disarmed the American, who felt himself grappling with the man body to body.

Crossdale was a born fighter, and the half-drunken Karmanian, in spite of the American's left hand with its slight wound, was no match for him. He thought that at any moment the other man would be upon him, but the soldier had taken to his heels and clattered down the stone stairs.

As Crossdale grappled with the fellow, he felt the bandage on his hand slip and the blood from his hurt began to flow. It maddened him, and feeling the man's knife in his belt, he was able to draw it violently from its sheath. He struck the man between the ribs, and he fell, his blood spurting over Zito; face down he fell upon his captain.

Crossdale caught up one of the napkins from the table of their feast, wound it round and round his hand, knotting it with his teeth, and flung himself out of the room, where he had laid the plans to build a railroad and held a Queen in his arms. He climbed out of the window on to the little ivy-covered staircase and made his way down, as the Queen and Jefferson Robinson had done.

What possible means was there for him now to escape? He was a triply-marked man, with two deaths for his record and the enmity and deadly hatred of the man in power.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

AMMETARO

At the bottom of the ladder he fell into the arms of Robinson, and big as Crossdale was, and muscular, he was at a disadvantage in the dark, surprised by the suddenness of the grip. The negro's voice, close to his ear, whispered:

"Fo' de lub ob Gawd, Boss, de're all roun' us, but ah kin git yo' free, swear to Gawd ah kin, if yo'll strip and put on dis hyar uniform."

Infusing his words with all the authority of which he was master, the American commanded him between his teeth: "Damn you, let me free!"

Centuries of unquestioning obedience were in the traditions of the African, whose forbears were slaves, and as the negro's arms released him, Crossdale drew a long breath and turned on him like a maddened beast. He caught the fellow by the throat and shook him as though he were a rat; he struck him once or twice violently and threw him from him, so that Jeff toppled over like a bag of coffee into the ivy vines, crashing as he fell. He would have shot the man then, but he did not wish to draw attention to his hiding place by a shot.

He had hardly thrown the man from him, cursing him for a treacherous skunk, when he heard the sound of approaching voices. Half a dozen men rode up, commanded by an officer in the regimentals of Sarvanarof. The man in charge

threw himself off his horse, glancing from the American, breathless, hatless, dishevelled, to the negro, who was not unconscious, pulling himself up by the vines. The Karmanian said in English:

"Mr. Crossdale, of the Royal State Railway, I believe? You are my prisoner, sir. Go," he ordered two of his men, "and help that man over there to get on his feet." To Jeff Robinson he nodded: "You have done well, my man, excellently, excellently! The President will reward you; you shall have every protection. The guardians of the new Republic have orders to arrest you, Mr. Crossdale, wherever you may be found. Will you hand over your arms?"

"Don't," said Stephen Crossdale, "let me see that negro servant of mine again! I warn you that I will shoot him on sight if I ever get this into my hand again." He gave over his gun. "I didn't know I was of so much importance in Karmania! It sounds as though I had been really doing something, instead of opening the way for you to come through."

They did him the honor of incarcerating him in the bell tower, in the beautiful room set apart for distinguished prisoners, and he believed that somewhere above him Karman Mara was herself a prisoner. From this turret the royal flag had fluttered down, and in its place the banner of the new Republic played with the winds.

Except to fetch food and drink, no one had been near him since his imprisonment. There was an excellent bed, a writing table with every furnishing for correspondence; there were a few books, a comfortable sofa, a wooden floor, and a tiny window, which Crossdale could reach by stand-

ing on a chair; it gave the round room the look of a cell. The door, heavily curtained on the inside, was of iron and bolted.

He was dulled. For some hours he had slept, his head on his arms, dressed as he was. But the morning brought him no hope, or even interest in his own fate. He could only think of Karmen Mara.

He did not believe that even these barbarians would execute an American citizen out of hand; and the legation at Bukarest would make inquiries for him. He had small concern for his own safety, in any case, although he had an idea that John Sarvanarof would do what he wanted with no matter whom; there would be nothing in the world easier than to put him out of the way quietly. They could inform the United States that he had been blown up by a bomb, that he had perished in the debris of some building that had been destroyed in the upheaval of the country. There would be a dozen reasons which could be given at such a time as this, the unmaking and remaking of a state. Germany had not declared war upon Karmania because of the murder of Baumgarten, and in what way was he better than his predecessor?

But could he have got away scot free he would not have done so without knowing the fate of the Queen, how he could see her again? And where? Would he ever see her again? He climbed often to the little window which gave him outlook on the brilliant heavens. She, too, looked at those stars from her window, as he did.

It gave him no special comfort to remember that Sarvanarof had been confined here and escaped and climbed

high afterward, and that Prince Sarvan had been confined here and gone free. He was sure that no other American citizen had been a political prisoner in this tower.

They had scores against him in Karmania, too. They could convict him; if they shot him before sunrise they would have reason. He had the death of two Karmanians to his account. And now that Sarvanarof knew of his relations with the Queen his state was bad.

No sign came to him that the Queen knew of his imprisonment or that she ever thought of him again. He could ask no questions; there was no one with whom he could speak—his food and drink were put in through a revolving window. He saw no face and heard no voice until at last the door grated, unlocked, clanged to again, and Captain Stanislas Korvan rushed in, threw his arms about his friend and kissed him on both cheeks.

Crossdale found himself hanging on to the Karmanian's hand as though it were a life rope, wringing it, looking at him as though he were the whole of Karmania, in a smart service uniform of Prince John's creation, cinder-gray with dark red reliefs.

"Courage, courage, Stephanos! Don't get downhearted—we'll pull you out of this, old man, sure as fate! How are you?" He looked at his friend with affectionate interest.

"I know it's not too uncomfortable here as far as a prison goes. I have tested it—I've slept on that bed and eaten off that revolving bookshelf. God, I know all you're going through! I had my share before they sent me to Pratz-Zenoe, and I had a woman to care about, just as you have." Crossdale wrung his hand.

"Now I can only stop a second," said Korvan. "It is bad for us both if I linger, but I want you to buck up, take heart!"

The American, gripping Korvan's arm hard, asked: "And the Queen?" by his tone of voice claiming every bit of knowledge that the Karmanian had to impart. "Karmen Mara?"

"Oh, she's all right, old man! Her imprisonment is only a farce, only a formality. Don't worry about her. Every hair of her head, you know, is sacred." Korvan saw him wince. "It is you I am thinking about," he continued. "I have not been able to advance your cause one step with the President. He is more autocratic than a Tsar."

"I dare say." Crossdale smiled bitterly. "I can't blame him for hating me."

Korvan shook his head. "Oh, he hates you, Stephen! And when he saw your study in the little tower—the table, the feast—when he saw that, and the bodies on the floor of Zito and the soldier—why I swear we thought he would have apoplexy. I was with him. It took two of us to hold him down." Crossdale listened. Things were looking pretty tight for him; there was no doubt about it.

"I was there when they brought him the things out of your pocket. Nothing compromising politically, old man, but when he saw that little handkerchief with the Queen's monogram, I thought the blood would burst from his temples." He glanced at the other's locked hands, at his set lips, and changed the conversation. "You will think I am a duffer to talk like this, old top, but I wouldn't do it if I were not sure down to my boots that we'll get you off."

A sceptical smile touched the American's lips.

"You have got a lot of expensive faith, Korvan," he said. "After what you have just said, I guess my goose is cooked. What do you think my fate hangs on, anyhow, that you seem so sure?"

Harking back to the old reverence, speaking of her in a tone both affectionate and reverential, Stanislas Korvan said: "The Queen. She is with the President now, at this moment."

Crossdale caught fire from his companion's words, but not in the way that Korvan meant he should. She was with John Sarvanarof! To what end? What power had he over Karmen Mara's will? The idea that this woman, who had given him her love, could be now in the presence of his enemy and of the man who adored her, was almost more than he could bear. Helpless, at the mercy of Sarvanarof's caprice or hate, he was powerless against the moment.

Still, his mind worked clearly and he knew what he wanted to find out, and he asked: "Do you know what the President intends to do? I mean to say, do you know what his plans are for the Queen of Karmania?"

As he spoke her name it seemed that his companion must see his emotion. He saw Korvan hesitate.

"Go on, Korvan. I can bear it whatever it is—I can bear anything but not knowing. Go on."

"The President has two propositions to place before Her Majesty this afternoon. Indeed, as we are talking here now, she has doubtless made her choice."

"Let's have it—what choice does he give her?"

"To exile her to England, with a suitable income for the rest of her life—"

"And the other?"

"To remain in Karmania and guide the ship of the republic with her husband."

The American stepped back. "Ah, my God!"

Korvan saw him cover his eyes with his hand and he muttered, leaning against the table: "Go, will you, and let me fight this out alone?"

"I must go," said Korvan, wringing his hand. "I have stayed too long as it is. By Jove! I hate to leave you alone like this."

"You can," said the other, "quite safely. Go—go—and remember that she has a choice."

For twenty-four hours on end he walked to and fro in his little cell, dreaming, musing, eating his heart out, yearning up to her through the intervening space. If thought and feeling could have carried him through the material barriers he would have been at her side. His brain and heart and senses were full of her.

Without he could hear the cries and shouts in the courtyard of the castle, "*savas*," acclamations, the constant repetition of the name Jehanos, snatches of her music set to revolutionary words; insults, cries, demands. He could even fancy that he heard them ask that she be delivered up to them.

"Is this the twentieth century?" he asked himself. "No, not on your life! Back, way back—"

During the night he was awakened by a soft touch against his hand. He sprang up and saw standing by his side Griffen, the old wolfhound. He seized the dog round the neck, buried his face in his thick coat, and as he did so and

the dog's collar touched his cheek, he wondered. He wound his hands in the collar and found a slip of paper fastened there.

He read out by his candle just one word, again one of those symbolic and double meaning words so prevalent in Karmania: *Ammetaro*, meaning "until the end" and also the root of the verb "to love."

He could not believe that this message had been sent to him without some idea that a message would be returned. He wrote on a small slip of paper, in English, the word: "Come," and twisted it back in the collar of the dog, concealing it in the wolfhound's thick, rough hair.

Even as he caressed the beast, the door opened, there was a low whistle; Griffen responded, bounded out, and the prisoner was alone.

A thousand times he weighed the chances of the Queen's acceptance of exile to England. What would be easier than to join her there? And then he added to himself: "Sarvanarof will never let me go!"

In the night watch and through the dark hours came the memories of their meeting in his tower, the feast, the love, all the adorable wonder of her, and even as he thrilled to it came with gruesome and sardonic cruelty the vision of the dead men on the floor. And as he mused and suffered, from without came the voices of the soldiers singing her most popular song:

"What shall be given
To him who comes riding—"

travestied, disfigured, ribald and foul. Oh, the poor

stranger! They had bruised and beaten him well in return for having opened the ways of Karmania to the sea. He could not but see the humor and the satire that it was. He had opened the tunnel in order that they might pass through, that this scum might pour itself into her Kingdom more freely!

He was sitting at his table, with his arms thrown across it and his head resting upon his arm when a guard came into the room, accompanied by four or five soldiers. "Are you ready, Mr. Crossdale?"

Stephen started up, stood, pale and with high beating heart, looking at the Karmanian, whom he had never seen before. He was a young man, ardent in his patriotism, with a new faith, and he could not conceal his pride and his satisfaction at being detailed to parley with this important prisoner.

"Are you ready?"

Stephen looked at him. "Ready for what?" and added to himself, "For death?"

"To leave Karmania, to leave the kingdom at once."

Stephen drew a long breath. There was the wind of liberty in it, the breath of freedom, the outer way again, the home trail, the old life, security—too good to be true! Too wonderful to be possible!

And then—free to go—at what price? And free to go—where? From where she was.

"To leave the country? By whose order?"

The young man handed him a dazzling looking document, written over and hung with seals. If the moment had not

been so thrilling to him and so vital, the picturesqueness of the paper would have amused him.

"Read," said the young officer, "it is incumbent that you read."

"You are herewith ordered to conduct Mr. Stephen Crossdale to the frontiers of the Republic of Karmania. You are to see that he is safely transported to Roumania within four days, by the way of Cye and Tamaresk. If he makes any attempt whatsoever to escape, or to return to the Republic, he is to be shot.

"(Signed) John Sarvanarof, First President
of the New Republic of Karmania.

"(Signed) Karmen Mara Basilof, ex-Queen
of Karmania."

There was her handwriting and her signature. This was the first word from her until the night before, on a slip of paper, he had seen her writing in the most sacred word in the Karmanian language.

Gazing at the paper which he held, Crossdale was asking himself hotly, with a poignant anguish: "What has she accepted—which of the propositions? What has she done?"

Exile—was that what she had chosen? Had she succeeded in banishing him in order that they should meet? And hope rose in his heart, and with a modicum of cheer he looked into the young man's face and tried to smile. But the grave and important young officer did not relax his features.

"In Cye you will be given an hour in your own quarters in which to bathe and dress and to pack your personal belong-

ings. We shall take them out with us. Here, meanwhile, is a raincoat and a cap."

For Crossdale was bareheaded and in the same clothes in which he had left Las Restaurus after the banquet, with the cabinet and the Prime Minister.

"General Sarvan has sent you these," said the young man. "He thought you might need them."

"Take them away," said Crossdale curtly. "I go as I came."

CHAPTER XXXIX

**"I WILL GIVE HIM THAT WHICH I HAVE
KEPT FOR HIM"**

"San Francisco on the telephone for Mr. Storm."

The chap who made this announcement in no sense suggested Jeff Robinson. He was a young man of the bell-boy type, employed at odd jobs, and during the three-quarters of the day which he apportioned to himself he studied mechanics in the garage. He suggested no past to his employer; he was connected with no romantic adventures, and would never set the world on fire or betray his master. Caleb Storm, who had come out unexpectedly to the ranch to pass a week-end with Crossdale, went in to answer a long distance call.

Crossdale was supremely indifferent to everything on the Western Continent. Since his return to California nothing had been able to rouse in him the slightest interest. His affairs were booming; hard times did not touch him. But he would rather have been poor and starting out again to fight his way; this perhaps would have given him a fresh impulse in life.

He had come directly west from Marseilles and felt as though he had been shot in one volley from Karmania to the Pacific coast. Between his leaving the prison turret and his coming home the interval was vague to him. He had

hung on in Bukarest as long as he dared in the vain hope of receiving some message from the Queen; but finally he was obliged to take his passports, for the United States Consulate made him understand that he was not *persona grata* in Central Europe. Finally he drifted off up the Danube toward the civilization for which Jeff Robinson had pined; the word would always be connected with the negro.

Since he had seen him slip away at the bottom of the steps of the brown tower, he had believed every evil of him. He could have strangled the man with his own hands gladly, and he mentally placed him in every kind of low, treacherous position, and believed him to be Sarvanarof's paid creature. But although the Queen of Karmania had no means of sending him a message, the night before he left Bukarest a note was thrust under his door. It was a letter from Jeff:

"Gawd Almighty, ain' Ah glayde yo' pulled out safe, Boss! Keep a stiff back, Mister Crossdale, suh. Et's gwine to be alright. Ah ain' gwine to lebe dis hyar joint twill Ah gits de old hawg's bristles. Trus' me, Boss. Ah furgive yo' fo' de hit 'n de cuss-wodes—Ah don' blame yo', but trus' ol' Jeff. By-by."

He had never told Storm a word about his Great Adventure. The engineering job for which he had gone to Karmania was successfully completed; he returned. And that was all the Transportation Company had to do with it. Indeed, had he wanted to chronicle his year and rehearse the incidents, they would not have defined themselves. Illusive, maddening, capricious as the shadow of a dream, they eluded him cruelly.

Old Storm had never forgiven his partner for not locating

the Karmanian oil wells, and he was so disgruntled about it that this disappointment in itself kept him from referring to Karmania.

"It just gets me, Steve, to think you missed that deal—you with your foot in the wells, as one might say! Can't get over it! A live wire like you! What the devil were you doing, man?"

Crossdale never told him. Storm, practical business man, with no interests outside the United States, excepting those which he could turn into money, was bent on making as many fortunes as he could in a lifetime. For nothing on earth would Crossdale have told his friend of his strange, maddening, fascinating year. He could not hear himself saying: "When I was in Karmania I fell in love with the Queen!" He had no desire to pose as a film star to his common-sense friend.

Indeed, he asked himself a dozen times if he had not dreamed it all. Even in his beautiful state, in his charming home, he could not frame his memories of Karmania—the dark-eyed, red-lipped Queen; the brilliant rooms of Las Restaurus; the mysterious brown tower. He could not hang them on his walls with photographs of the Yosemite Valley and his polo ponies. Had he not perhaps been seriously ill in Bukarest without knowing it? Was not the whole thing the phantasmagoria of a fevered dream?

So Karmania blurred before his vision. There was nothing in California to recall it. Karmania shares were not quoted on the San Francisco Stock Exchange, nor her latest news cabled to the daily papers. Many interests absorbed the firm in which Crossdale was a silent partner. Their

London house had received full payment for all the work on the Karmanian State Railroad. Karmanian affairs were closed as far as they were concerned. But the oil wells were a constant source of irritation to Storm, and he could not forgive the failure of his friend to locate them.

The first thing that Crossdale did when he returned home was to get out her little photograph to dream over every line of it, to compare the features in the picture with Karmen Mara as he knew her. And he stood the little picture up again on his bureau, as he had used to have it near him in his days at Yale. And she looked at him with her sweet grave eyes.

"Little girl," he said to the picture, "twice a ruler and only once a woman, if I only could have run away with you from school!"

And the sense of her then, and the thrill and passion of their single meeting, snatched by them from the book of Fate, swayed him until his image of her was so poignant that this past became real and everything else a vision.

Storm had studied his friend more sensitively than Crossdale knew, and he was determined when the right moment came to get his confidence. Stephen heard the receiver banged up; Storm's voice ceased and he came hurrying out on the porch, beaming, bursting with excitement, his eyes bright with the dazzle that only money had the power to create in him. He held a slip of paper in his hand. He cried out:

"Gosh, Steve, you're a wonder! You're a great old secret-keeper! To think of getting this over the telephone!"

He waved the slip of paper, and his friend waited with

tepid interest. Contracts and projects for further riches interested him not at all.

"Good work, Boy, great! You're a fine little prospector, and I hope to God you'll let some of this interest get under your skin."

"What the hell's the matter with you?" growled the Californian.

Storm was grinning at him, his keen eyes on him with satisfied amusement. "Boy," he said, "it's a pretty good one, but I've run you to earth. Why the deuce didn't you tell me what you were doing in Karmania?"

At this word the red color that ran under Crossdale's brown cheek showed that something at last had roused him, but Storm continued: "Come, Steve, unload! We're all friends in the Transportation Company—what was the point of keeping this so dark? You let me curse you out for your punk performance in Karmania regarding the locating of the wells—"

Now Crossdale interrupted wearily: "Oh, that's the dope, is it—those confounded old wells!"

Storm unfurled the slip which he had written out over the telephone. "That's why you left that negro behind! First time in my life I ever heard of a North American negro developing diplomatic qualities! But you're the stuff, Steve—I'll let you go round the world for the Western Transportation Company any time!"

"Do you mean to say you've heard from Jeff Robinson?"

"Oh, come," said Storm, "don't be a fool. You know it all better than I do." He handed the slip which he had written out to Crossdale.

"The Western Transportation and Karmanian Oil Company was formed today in London at your offices. Details following by mail. Signed Stanislas Korvan and Jefferson Robinson."

Crossdale read it and stared blankly into the eyes of his partner, who was saying to him sharply: "Who is Korvan? Who is Stanislas Korvan? Is he one of the agents, too? Jefferson Robinson is the negro, isn't he?"

And Crossdale said shortly: "Yes."

"It's just two years ago," said the excited Storm, "that I came out here to ask you to go to Karmania—now we'll celebrate the anniversary. Buck up, for God's sake, Steve—don't look like a ghost about it. It simply means that we must have purchased about a thousand acres of land—that's what I doped out to you—from the Kingdom of Karmania, or else we own it with a joint company in the Kingdom."

Crossdale, who still looked at the pencilled words on the paper as though they linked him vitally with the past, said in a superior manner: "Kingdom of Karmania? It isn't a *kingdom*—it's a republic."

A thrill went through him as he said these words. A republic, with John Sarvanarof for President and with the Queen of Karmania for his wife! An expression of pain passed over his face; his lips twitched. He heard Storm say: "Republic nothing, Steve! You live out here like a savage." He laughed. "You don't follow the course of events, do you? Since the last revolution it is a monarchy. Here—" he took a folded newspaper out of the pocket of his sack coat. "I brought this out—thought it might interest you. I forgot to show you before."

Storm found the paragraph and read it, above his eyeglasses. Crossdale did not listen as he read him the little resume of Karmania's history. He had heard it on the Danube boat from the lips of John Sarvanarof, as he had told him so charmingly of the land he loved. The little legend of the ancient republic fell on unheeding ears, but to the next he listened with his soul.

"At last some fugitive rumors have penetrated to the West regarding the fortunes of the passionate and ardent inhabitants of Karmania. Their country is in constant revolt and the course of events changes so rapidly that it is hard to know just what is going on. But it is known now that shortly after Sarvanarof's proclaiming himself President of the New Republic of Karmania he was murdered by the Royalist Party and Prince Sarvan, son of the former King Peter, proclaimed King."

Storm looked at Crossdale and folded up the paper and was about to put it back in his pocket, but the young man took it from him, held it, staring at the words which he could not read for emotion. Looking up at Storm, he said, speaking with difficulty: "Murdered? John Sarvanarof murdered? And they don't say anything about the Queen?"

"Come," said Storm, putting his hand on the arm of his friend, "let's go indoors, Steve. You've not told me a damn thing about Karmania, and since we're going to get wickedly rich in that little kingdom, let's hear all you know about it. And who on God's earth would you talk to, if it wasn't to little me?"

That evening, after a long, hard ride, Crossdale came

slowly back to the bungalow, down the little trail bordered by the brilliant sage bushes. His mare picked her way daintily over the soft path.

He was in no hurry to go indoors. He had ridden long in the fresh, delicious air. He had tried, as he did so often now, to tire himself out, so that he might sleep and forget. He knew that he would only find old K down there to keep him company, and perhaps it would be harder than ever to see Storm now, for he had told him everything. There would be the photograph of the little girl upstairs, but she had never given him any kisses that he could remember. She had never grown up to his love.

After his long talk with Caleb, his confession, which had lasted into the late afternoon, Karmania had become vivid and real to him again; and he remembered step by step the journey from Savia to Tamaresk; the stop at his old quarters in Cyé, which he and Korvan had shared together; the gathering together of his belongings; the finding under the bricks of the chimney the documents from Storm regarding the oil wells safely hidden by Jeff. So that was why Jeff Robinson had wanted the letters! He had copied them; his cupidity and his vanity, his desire for wealth, had triumphed over everything else! He remembered the interminable four days' journey, over the new railroad as far as Roda, over the road he had built and laid, and the subsequent dragging trail of horse and carriage finally to the door of the old Grand Hotel in Tamaresk. And every foot of the way had been heavy with his sense of loss of Her; every turn of the wheels meant that he was leaving her forever. He had no means of getting a message back; he had

no hope of receiving any token or sign—nothing but her word on the slip of paper, engraved on his soul and binding him to her.

His escort had been of the most severe and military type. He was treated as a prisoner of war; and when he passed the turn of the road where the brigands of Prince John had originally taken him prisoner, he wished with all his soul that another unthought-of circumstance might seize him and carry him back into captivity, that he might breathe the air with her.

At a table in "The Yellow Moon," over an indifferent meal, he was surprised to see how tawdry and sordid the place seemed to him now, its charm smitten out by his excitement and grief. As he had lingered over his tasteless meal, the company in the room broke up into a free fight, for the musicians tried to play one of the Queen's songs and the revolutionaries forced them to turn it into a new national air.

In the disturbance he had gone out to the Danube boat, a peasant lad carrying his small luggage after him. Then the river again, with its charm and fascination gone, bore him out of the country at last, in spite of himself.

Then the stop at Bukarest, the eternal waiting for news of some kind. He knew through the cold, impersonal medium of a Bukarest newspaper what Karmen Mara's choice had been. She had agreed to marry the President of the New Republic and direct the affairs of the state with her husband.

Nothing after that made any difference to him.

Now, on this night, as he came slowly up to the bungalow,

he saw the little supper table spread on the terrace, and spread for three. The awning was drawn back from the porch; they were to eat in the open under the sky.

But the sight of the supper table, the return home, gave him no thrill. He scarcely wondered at the extra place. Nothing affected him. He stood with his hands in his pockets, smoking before going in, looking up to the foothills, fast becoming indistinct in the falling night. From his gardens came the perfume of heliotrope and rose. It was a land of beauty, a kingdom of luxuriant bloom, and the most lonely paradise that could be imagined.

As he stood like this, he heard some one touch the piano in the living room. Caleb Storm played all the popular music by ear. Unmoved, he listened to the chords—but where on earth had Storm ever heard that melody? He had always thought that if that strain again should meet his ears, he could never bear it.

“What shall be given to him who comes riding
Over the mountains and through the forests
To our hill city?
Much gold and glory?

“He comes for neither.
So the rider, the stranger,
Goes back unsatisfied!

“What shall I give him
Who comes so far and so gladly?
A gift for a stranger,
A gift for a rider,

I will give him that which I have kept for him—
that which my mother gave me.

What is this gift? The heart in my breast.

When he feels it he will count its beating."

He listened to it, sung in Karmanian by a woman's voice, and then, as though he were a somnambulist, slowly drawn by the music, he went into the living room.

A woman sat behind his piano. She wore a small dark hat, which came down closely over her brow and ears; she wore a flowered veil, which concealed her face. She was all in black like a shadow, with splendid milk-white pearls in her ears, and a string of real pearls around her neck, such as Queens in romances wear.

She sprang up and cried out as Crossdale came in, and she rushed up the stairs like a school girl in her short dress, displaying a fine length of slender leg in silk stocking, and high-heeled shoes. She found a door open and she took cover. It was Crossdale's own room.

But he ran her to earth by his bureau, where she stood straight, with her hands behind her, leaning on the bureau. And back of her the little old picture, grave-eyed, and it seemed to curiously regard her.

"I don't take drugs, and they have stolen my liquor, so I am just mad, that's all!"

She did not say a word. She smiled, until he saw her lips quiver. Then he put his arms about her and unfastened her veil and unpinned her smart little hat and put it on his cushion, where no woman's hat had ever been; and it fell over the little old picture of the young princess and snuffed her out.

"You wrote the word 'Come,' Stephen Crossdale. I found it in Griffen's collar, and I was brought up to obey. They say a good ruler should learn the lesson of obedience." She held him back from her. "I want to tell you of my journeyings. I would rather travel from Karmania to China than spend another night in your sleeping hotels."

"Did you come alone?"

"Ask the immigration officials. I've brought half my kingdom with me, all the Karmanian Oil Company."

Before any magician could transfix them to stone, he kissed her and found her real, and he kissed her to prove how real he was and that California does not quench the fever of life and desire. Some one coming up the stairs made them start apart and she took up her smart little hat, and the girl of the photograph was discovered again and gazed in grave wonder at the girl who had grown up. Karmen Mara settled her hair as naturally before his glass as though it had been her mirror in the palace.

Crossdale looked at the image of a woman in his little mirror. Heavens, what a royal world it was!

From the door, Jefferson Robinson, large stockholder in the Western Transportation and Karmanian Oil Company, in a fashionable coat of the latest cut, bought from Poole in London as they passed through, in a myrtle green cravat bought from a bang-up haberdasher in Paris as they passed through, a decoration in his buttonhole given to him by what country and for what valor Crossdale had yet to discover, announced gently:

"De supper am ready, Mister Crossdale, an' Yo' Majesty, Mis' Vassylot, ma'am. And Mr. Storm do say—"

What Caleb Storm said or thought was drowned in the crashing of his chords upon the piano in the living room. His fingers wandered into a national air, and then left it and got tangled up in a wedding march, and he kept on.

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